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Narrative Discoveries of Adolescent Students with Emotional Disabilities in the Art Classroom

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NARRATIVE DISCOVERIES OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABLITIES IN THE ART CLASSROOM

by

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ABSTRACT

This classroom-based study explores the role of storytelling among adolescent students with emotional disabilities in the art classroom. The research is based on existing literature and seeks to make useful discoveries about the effects of combining art and narrative methodologies as a method for increasing participation and engaging interests among the student population studied. The research question investigates how students construct their own stories when prompted to share. To discover participant responses and the effects of storytelling, a visual exemplar and a TED biographical artist narrative of the contemporary artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo were presented to the students. Data was collected to reflect students' personal storytelling constructions in relation to the narrative examples which also included the shared teacher story. Student surveys, interviews, warm-up questions, artwork, and researcher field notes were analyzed for significant meaning. The author reports that storytelling in the classroom proves to have a positive effect overall on student engagement. The research findings show students had a clear vision of the personal stories they wanted to tell for their visual constructions prior to the artist exemplars. The author notes that the phenomenon of student participants' predilection for sharing personal stories might be reflective of the supportive and structured environment in which they are cultivated. The research study results will be used for the design and development of future storytelling units to encourage students' continual engagement in art curricula.

Keywords: *storytelling, themed curriculum, narrative, adolescent students, art education, art, students with emotional disabilities*

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

PAGE

LIST OF FIGURES

PAGE

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the Study

The contemporary art classroom is an environment where students can be given the time and opportunity to explore storytelling: a basic form of expression and communication. ”Through stories we explain, interpret, and assess situations, experiences, and ideologies, leading in turn to the creation of new meanings. As an intrinsic form of human communication, storytelling is prevalent in all aspects of human interaction” (Chung, 2007, p. 17). For adolescent students with emotional disabilities, being able to appropriately and clearly express one’s ideas through a shared story is not always an easy task.

This chapter introduces and outlines the researcher’s motivation for exploring the topic of a storytelling-themed curriculum in the special education art classroom. Research goals, both intellectual and personal are presented, as is the conceptual framework. In addition to the perceived significance of the study, limitations of the research are addressed. Leading scholarly research on the topics of integrating storytelling, teaching adolescents, and supporting emotionally disabled students within the context of art education are presented as the theoretical framework for the research study. The researcher believes in the power of storytelling and through the research study hoped to discover ways of using storytelling as a method to motivate adolescent students with emotional disabilities to participate in creative and identity-seeking experiences.

Background to the Study

Special education students who suffer from emotional disorders struggle to feel good about themselves and their worlds around them. For adolescent students at the Frost School who have emotional disabilities, feeling motivated and confident enough to participate in academic

lessons is a daily challenge. Writer of *Reaching and Teaching Students with Special Needs through Art,* Doris Guay (2006) asserts, "teaching students with disabilities in the art classrooms begins, not so much with full knowledge and understanding of disabilities, management techniques, and strategies, but with caring and a belief in the values of art education" (p. 8).

Janet Olson (1998) is the author of *Encouraging Visual Storytelling* and one of numerous researchers who believes in the power of narrative as a meaningful and authentic approach to engaging students in the art classroom. She claims that "to ignore the relationship between story and art is to risk removing the human dimension from art" (p. 197). The purpose of this research study, within the context of the special education art classroom, was to bridge the belief that the art classroom is a place where "students learn through art rather than about it" (Simpson, 1998, p. 317) with the belief that storytelling as an overarching theme can be employed to encourage and motivate students to participate in a meaningful, authentic, and personally identifying creative experience (Olson, 1998; Zander, 2007).

It's unimaginable that any student wouldn't have a single story to tell: be it fantasy, real-life, mythological, or personal. However, a recurring response from students at the Frost School when urged to share a visual story has often been, "but, I don't have a story to tell". As the researcher has experienced, students can become detached, frustrated, and even resentful in the aforementioned scenario. While the purpose of the research study was to look at the power of storytelling as a motivator, for students with emotional disorders in the special education classroom, the more specific focus was to answer some of the questions that have evolved from numerous situations that are less favorable: Are empty responses of this nature due to a misunderstanding of what a story is? Are students afraid to respond because the teacher has not fostered a safe, story-sharing classroom environment? Are students not confident in their

understanding of what is being asked of them because the teacher has not provided adequate and explicit examples? Reframing the prompt for students to share stories in the context of a storytelling themed curriculum, one that explores the meaning of narrative and exposes students to visual storytelling examples, might be a solution to the perceived problem. The motivation also included biographical narratives of the artists being studied to attempt to cultivate authentic and engaged responses from students with emotional disabilities.

Research Goals

This research study goal was to build on existing research to make useful discoveries and to investigate the possible outcomes of combining art and narrative methodologies in the art classroom as a means of engaging and motivating adolescent students with emotional disorders. For the researcher, this study was one of curiosity and dissatisfaction as a result of classroom experiences at the Frost School. It addressed the question of whether it is possible for students with emotional disabilities to explore personal narratives in a safe and structured environment, once a working prototype has been provided as inspiration. The goal was to demonstrate the importance of providing explicit examples of visualized stories as a way for students to better understand concepts for all themes and subjects, not just story-based, introduced in the classroom.

The researcher used this research study as an opportunity to become a better listener and observer, so that these skills may be applied transversely to current and future classes. Shared stories and responses to narrative exemplars might be a means for discovering personal identities of students and might reveal prevalent patterns and/or themes that can inform design decisions for future curricula.

Research Questions

The question that aimed to address the aforementioned goals was: How might adolescent students with emotional disabilities tell their personal stories when prompted with both a visual exemplar and an artist narrative as opposed to only a visual exemplar? This comparative question looked specifically at students' constructions of their own stories either about themselves or their world in response to only a visual exemplar and in response to a more comprehensive prompt: one that includes the same visual exemplar and a story about the central artist. Additional questions that were related to this main narrative inquiry include: How might knowing about the artists' stories influence personal responses to interpreting and understanding a work of art? In what ways might students respond to personal art stories shared by the teacher? How might these responses compare to the responses of stories about artists who are less familiar to the students?

Conceptual Framework

The data collected reflected informal observations, routine documentation, and scheduled interactions with participants. The processes included collecting data through student participant surveys and interviews, photographic examples of student artwork, responses from daily student warm-ups, and researcher field note observations and reflective memos. Data was analyzed objectively for comparative concepts. The researcher evaluated patterns in student behavior related to the lesson; analyzed data for the level of student engagement; looked for any evidence of increased effort and interest as seen in the student's participation and artwork, and reviewed student responses from surveys, warm-up responses, and interviews. Strategies to aid in the analysis of the data included coding and connecting strategies, matrices, and rereading processes.

The concepts of this narrative study were grounded and informed by experiences that the researcher had witnessed in relationship to the effects of storytelling in the context of art. Personal experiences as an artist have revealed that all art is the product of a narrative. As an artist, it is difficult to create authentically without imparting a personal story to some degree. Stories may not always be lighthearted and extraordinary, but the power of narrative discourse points to the ability of the creator and listener/viewer to interpret the story for meaning. Being aware of stories and deciding to understand stories of all kinds is identity-shaping. Students with emotional disabilities often believe that they have no story worthy of sharing. Perhaps the questions of identity and confidence could be partially resolved if these same students were exposed to the power of making meaning out of stories.

Theoretical Framework

At the basis of this research study was the theory that a teacher's knowledge of the student learner's interests has an effect on classroom engagement. Janet Olson (1998) warns that, "when teachers have difficulty making connections to the life experiences of their students, they often rely on their own histories and stories to inform curricula" (p. 193). The teacher approach of making curriculum decisions based on only personal interests can be particularly troublesome in the special education classroom where students' defenses are already up and skepticism is a recurring theme. Olson's research has shown that "the arts provide a unique opportunity for teachers to relate to students on a personal level, to learn about their interests, their concerns, their worries, and their lives" (p. 182). Hafeli's (2008) research also points to the concept of knowing your students' interests. She argues that "until art teachers consider students' ideas and experiences as valid content… we are at risk of operating under assumptions about what constitutes authentic and contemporary studio practice" (p. 68).

The storytelling curriculum can be used as a method for learning more about students' interests and as a way of engaging students in an identity-seeking experience. Hamilton and Weiss (2005), writers of *Children Tell Stories* remind us to "think of storytelling *not* as another subject to teach but as a tool that can be used in any subject" (p. xvii). Zander (2007) discovered through her own narrative research that:

> As both teachers and students, whether it is a story we tell ourselves or others about what we think or the social narratives that form our perspectives towards society and culture, these narratives play an important role in making sense of human experiences and in forming self-awareness. (p. 191)

The research study is based on the theory linking teachers' knowledge of their student learner to increased engagement and using storytelling as a means for doing so. This concept, however, is based on the theory that students with emotional disabilities have the ability to interact with the art curriculum. Hunter and Jones (2006), assert that "the art classroom is not about the teacher, it is about the students… and art offers students with emotional/behavioral problems a socially appropriate outlet for their feelings" (p. 44). By praising students' skills, capitalizing on successes, and reinforcing student achievements, the art classroom can be a safe, fostering environment for all students to learn about themselves, particularly students with emotional disabilities (pp. 56-59).

The adolescent student's response to the art classroom was another topic of consideration for this research study. Adolescents in general have difficulty with the creative process because it can be a very vulnerable experience. Many students are not naturally inclined to be artistic and/or hesitant to participate in an art curriculum due to less favorable past experiences. Feldman (1996) discusses the obstacle of teaching adolescents, who often in this stage of

development, struggle to create with the ease and fluidity they once did as children (p. 74). He refers to this impediment as the "crisis of adolescence" (p.74).

Adolescent students with emotional disabilities are apt to view the creative process negatively and often question the role and purpose of art education in their lives, consequently impeding on their ability to participate and produce enthusiastic works of art. While this might be an inevitable reality for many students across all disciplines, it was not a lost cause in the art classroom. The decline of artistic expression in late childhood was an ongoing and well identified problem in the field of art education, but this research study aimed to use storytelling, a familiar activity, as a way of relating adolescent students to the art curriculum.

Significance of the Study

The classroom-based research study was an appropriate approach to documenting and analyzing actual responses that can be used in combination with the existing research to improve teacher practices and student learning experiences. The research study addressed educational concepts related to narrative inquiry that apply across the broad field of education and special populations and more specifically focused within the discipline of art education. Investigating story constructions of students with emotional disabilities might reveal methods and ideas that can be applied by teachers in all fields. The hope is that the conclusions discovered will be used to develop better informed student-centered curricula and to provide grounds for establishing relationships in the classroom as a way of connecting students to an educational experience. The information gained could be useful and beneficial for educators, administrators, staff members of therapeutic schools, and parents.

The research study was in response to the desire to improve as an educator, whose challenge it is to engage adolescent students with emotional disabilities in an art curriculum. Motivated by the daily obstacle within the Frost School community to sustain students' attention and to inspire creative endeavors, coupled by the previous fruitless attempts to incorporate a storytelling themed art project, this research study was an active and significant step toward exploring a solution. Reactions of students with emotional disabilities are not always predictable, sometimes even self-injurious; however, it was the belief of the researcher that this intense length-based study will provide a more reflective and analytical framework from which to make better informed decisions related to the safety and emotional health of the students. The community of professionals at the Frost School might be able to apply the lessons learned to their respective disciplines. If discoveries made reveal a significant and positive effect of storytelling in the special education art environment there might be opportunities to extend the concepts to a more community-encompassing and integrated model of teaching.

Limitations of the Study

One of the main constraints of this research study involved deciding on the details of the storytelling lessons. As established in the aforementioned text, the learners' engagement in a lesson is dependent on his/her interests. While the researcher has worked with all the student participants for an extended amount of time and relationships have formed, not all students will be drawn to all of the lesson prompts and visual exemplars presented. By exposing student participants to a myriad of storytelling examples, it was hopeful that the experience as a whole unit would reflect responses, as opposed to relying on reactions and constructions from only one lesson. Zander (2007) recognized from her own research that all teachers who want to employ narrative themes and reflect on its role and value in art may not be able to do so "because the

stories of art are many and often require considerable research and experience to effectively embed them in instruction" (p. 200).

An additional concern and plausible limitation to the study was the number of student participants and the consistency of attendance. There are few students in the Frost School community as compared to public school systems due to the nature of special education programs. Particularly since last year's graduation numbers, recent drop-outs, and numerous hospitalizations, the number of students in the art classes is considerably low. Although small class size is effective for individual teaching strategies, it was not the best scenario for a research study that aimed to look at responses of more than a couple of students. An added limitation was the concern that not all students would feel comfortable or be willing to participate in the research study. One student decided not to participate in the interview.

Regular attendance was a variable of considerable concern as it is an ongoing scheduling conflict for teachers and students at the Frost School. Depending on personal circumstances, at times some students find it difficult to attend school or a particular class and either avoid or refuse attendance. There are additional interruptions that effected attendance which include: scheduled individual, family, and group therapy sessions, athletic activities during the day, academic and psychological testing, IEP meetings, and twice monthly half-days due to treatment reviews. These were in addition to the more predictable and scheduled interruptions such as sports events and holiday breaks.

Another limitation was related to the researcher's goal to become a better listener and understanding individual. As an art educator in a special education classroom, sometimes the teacher's role becomes more therapeutic than is typical or expected in a public school setting. Because of the complex relationship that is a natural result of a therapeutic community with

small-class sizes and individual instruction, it is possible that the classroom art teacher's role can be construed as the role of an art therapist. The research study proposed to distinguish these professional roles and to substantiate the claim that the art teacher in the special education classroom has the power to encourage personal reflection and share narratives without adopting an art therapist philosophy or crossing personal boundaries.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the foundation and motivating reasons for the research inquiry. The researchers' goals, both personal and intellectual, were framed in relationship to the primary research question: How might adolescent students with emotional disabilities tell their personal stories when prompted with both a visual exemplar and an artist narrative as opposed to only a visual exemplar? Significant theories and noted literature related to previous scholarly research on the topics of this classroom-based study were introduced. Both the significance of this study as it applies to the general education classroom, the special education classroom, and the art classroom were discussed. Finally, limitations and constraints that were inherent to the research study were addressed. The following chapter will take a closer look at the conceptual framework and the scholarly literature that applies to narrative art methodologies.

Definition of Terms

Narrative - Zander (2007) refers to narratives as a "loosely organized series of verbal, symbolic, or social behaviors that are sequenced in order to tell someone else something that has happened, while story is a form of narrative with a beginning, middle, and end" (p. 190). For the purposes of this research study, story and narrative will be used interchangeably, but narrative will refer to a grouping of multiple stories as opposed to a "particular event or set of events" (p. 190).

Story - Janet Olson's (1998) definition of story will be used for the purposes of this research study. She defines story as "a visual or verbal narrative related to real experiences, imagined experiences or a combination of both' can be presented sequentially or as an isolated moment in time" (p.205).

Storytelling - The definition of storytelling according to Janet Olson (1998) is "the act of sharing stories, either visually or verbally" (p. 205).

Students with Emotional Disabilities – Hunter & Jones (2006) use the definition of "emotional disturbance" provided by the Federal regulations of IDEA 2004-300.8 (c) (4) which states:

> (I) The term means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student's educational performance:
>
> (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
>
> (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

(II) The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to students who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. (p. 46)

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

This chapter was structured to provide a clearer understanding of the researcher's motivation and personal interest in the concept of storytelling as it related to the research participants: adolescent students with emotional disabilities who are enrolled in Art Fundamentals at the Frost School. The chapter will discuss the conceptual framework, including the researcher's knowledge of and personal interest in art education and special education fields, topics of research, strategies employed in the research, and the goals of the study. Research topics related to the theme of storytelling in the contemporary classroom and integral to the action-base study include listening to the learner, understanding the adolescent student, supporting students with emotional disabilities, and meaning-making through storytelling. These topics were used as the theoretical framework and are presented in the sections below in relationship to the review of existing literature.

Background

Adolescent students attending the Frost School, a therapeutic special education program in Maryland, are not unlike students in other school programs; they have unique stories to share. Frost students share verbal stories with peers and staff members throughout the day, usually through casual conversations during unstructured times and in non-academic settings. The Frost School serves students with emotional disabilities and provides therapeutic support through individual, family, and group counseling sessions. It is during these times that students are also encouraged to share their stories, ones that might not be in the same tone and spirit as the stories shared on the basketball court, but important, nonetheless.

There are infinite reasons why stories are shared and equally as many variations in the types of stories that can be shared. From the researcher's experience as an art educator at the Frost School for over two years, it is evident that students with emotional disabilities are inclined to share stories when they feel safe and secure to do so and with people whom they have an established relationship.

Research Question

The research question developed from an interest in meshing storytelling with an art curriculum design and from a desire to confront storytelling roadblocks in the art classroom as presented in the Frost School. Provided with a clear and explicit definition of story, visual exemplars, and artist narratives, the researcher was interested in discovering how students would construct their own stories about themselves and their world. As a result of this inquiry the following research question was formed: How might adolescent students with emotional disabilities tell their personal stories when prompted with both a visual exemplar and an artist narrative as opposed to only a visual exemplar?

Conceptual Framework

This case-study compared one lesson, which included only a visual art exemplar from which students were prompted to construct their own stories, to another lesson which also included an artist narrative to provide a more comprehensive storytelling example. The data collected included student participant surveys and interviews, photographic examples of student artwork, responses from daily student warm-ups, and researcher field-note observations and reflective memos. Strategies to aid in the analysis of the data included coding and connecting strategies, matrices, and rereading processes.

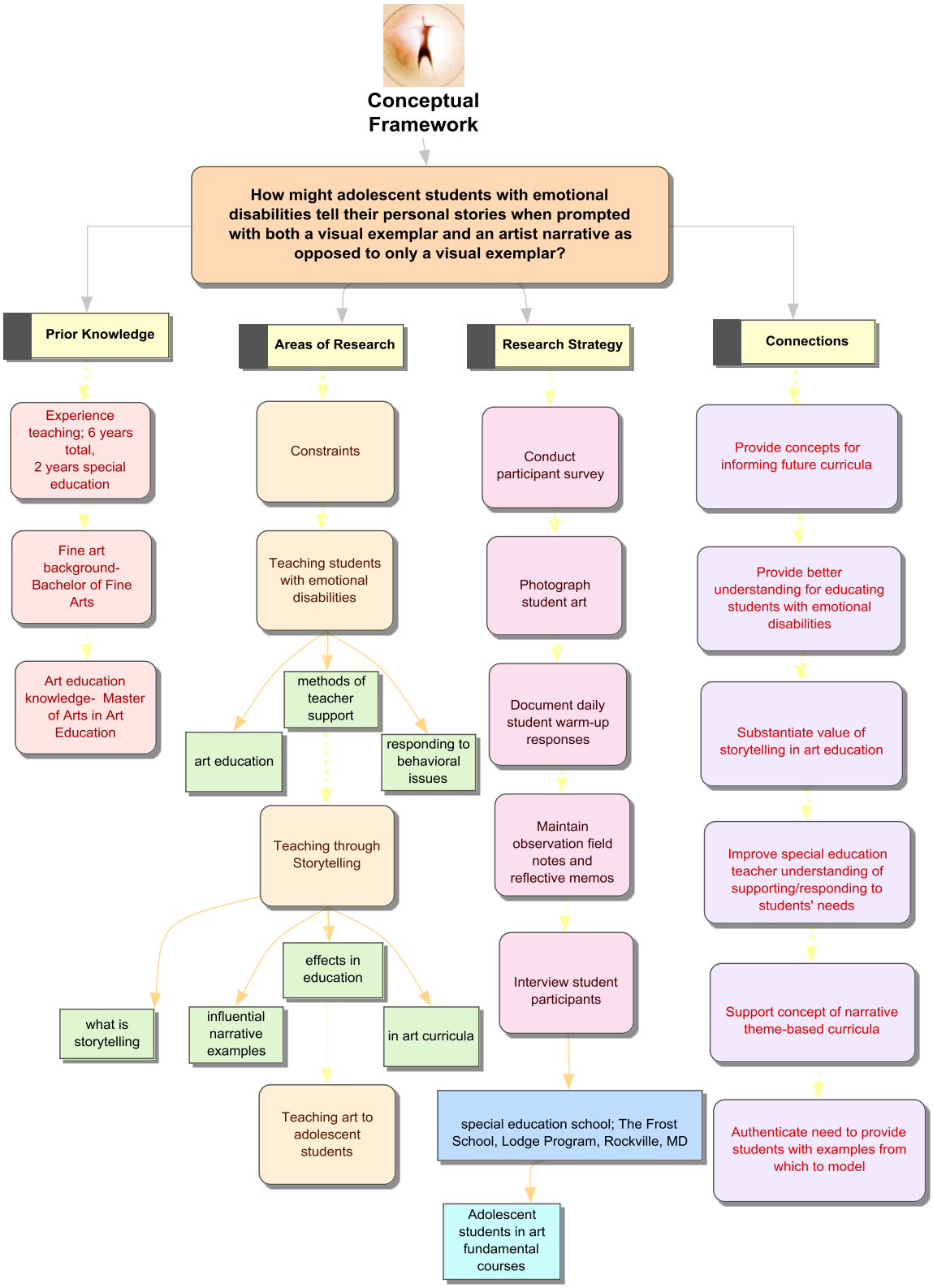

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

The researcher has a personal interest in autobiographical and biographical stories. She has read countless books about people's life stories. Some stories of interest include: *Wild*, an account of a young woman who hiked the entire Pacific Coast Trail solo in search of her identity; and *Life after Death* another autobiographical story told by Damien Echols who was wrongly accused of a satanic witch-killing and sentenced to death at 18, serving nearly twenty years before his release. These stories are not necessarily pleasant, but the researcher was captivated by the story told: not the series of events necessarily, but how conflicts were handled by the individual effected. The interest in stories is rooted in a curiosity to better understand the will of people to overcome adversity. The researcher is continually intrigued by how people find inspiration and views stories as an opportunity to learn and grow as an individual, a human theme she believes was worth sharing with her students with emotional disabilities.

Literature Review

The action research aimed to explore and expand on previous narrative methodologies within the context of the special education art classroom with a focus on personal story constructions by adolescent students that employed the use of visual exemplars and artist narratives. There is a natural relationship between the topics discussed in greater depth in the following sections: listening to the learner, knowing the learner, understanding the adolescent student, supporting students with emotional disabilities, and meaning-making through storytelling. Janet Olson's (1998), *Encouraging Visual Storytelling*, resonates with meaning and significance and was used as the theoretical framework of this research study:

> If educators cannot make realistic connections to the lives and stories of their students, their students will never reach their full potential as learners. Their students will never

> learn to discuss their art in the verbal mode of expression or from their heart. The opportunity to make education relevant and meaningful will be lost (p. 193).

Listening to the Learner

Olson (2003) references the significance of listening to the student as a major contribution of Victor Lowenfeld's to the field of art education (p. 35). Her experience as an art researcher has shown that for many teachers it's easier for adults to dictate to the learner rather than to take the necessary time needed to understand the learner. Such methodology often results in cookie cutter projects (p. 35), that illustrate it is not a suitable or preferable method of instructing.

Solar (2011) reminds us that students with emotional and behavioral disabilities want honest answers and want to be heard. Students are not necessarily asking the teacher to relate on a personal level, but they want the teacher to listen (p. 42). He encourages active listening skills and distinguishes that the "key is to not only listen but to *hear* what the student is saying" (p. 42).

What better to way to listen to a student than to hear their stories? Hafeli's (2008) research reveals a contemporary art education approach that requires "purposeful looking and listening" (p. 65) for the adolescent student's interest. She claims that "stories and their dialogues, contained in both visual and verbal forms, have the ability to divulge bits of reality and certainty that are… 'even more true than what was actually said'" (p. 65). The areas of research below extend on the concept of authentically listening to student interests as a method for engaging and motivating participation and storytelling construction.

Knowing the Learner

Hamilton and Weiss (2007) echo the concepts above regarding listening to the student through the use of storytelling. They claim, "you learn a great deal from listening to your students tell stories….Through storytelling, teachers learn not only about students' personalities, but also about how students learn" (p. 21). A desired result of listening to the student is becoming aware and conscious of the student's interests in an effort to guide their learning. An advocate of a child-centered art philosophy, Janet Olson (1998) believes "the arts provide a unique opportunity for teachers to relate to students on a personal level, to learn about their interests, their concerns, their worries, and their lives" (p. 182).

In an article, *Children at the Center of Art Education,* published after attending as a guest lecturer at 2002 NEAE conference, Janet Olson (2003) warns that the art teacher should be concerned with the educational value of the artistic process as opposed to the aesthetics of the product. So as not to stray from the important subject – the child, Olson reminds contemporary art teachers, "one must never forget the individual and the human experience that informs the artist process" (p. 41).

Understanding the Adolescent Student

The researcher was first introduced to the concept of the "crisis of adolescence" as coined by Victor Lowenfeld, cited in Feldman (1996). Feldman's (1996) *Philosophy of Art Education* provides a psychological explanation and a scholarly method of identifying the adolescent decline of artistic expression. Feldman's description of the "crisis" is almost an exact description of what was first witnessed six years ago by the researcher when she began teaching secondary art classes at a college-preparatory school and what continues to be seen in the Frost

School art classroom today: "the pupil's spontaneous flow imagery ceases, to be replaced by hesitant and often cramped artistic production accompanied by what seems to be a painful and excessive self-criticism" (p. 74).

Evidence of Feldman's (1996) philosophical viewpoint of the adolescent in art education is found in the research literature by Amorino (2009), Hafeli (2008), and Cummings (2010). Amorino's (2009) sensory-based curriculum research reveals concepts related to the role of art "providing the rapidly evolving adolescent with a means by which to identify, reflect upon, and impart an organized, intelligent voice to elusive, confusing, and often disturbing concerns in ways that may contribute to a sought-after homeostasis and a stabilized complexion" (p. 229). Hafeli's (2008) research points to the success of engaging students through their own informed inquiry of contemporary art examples that explore adolescent themes. Her study links to the importance of students' own ideas for making art (p. 68).

Cumming's (2010) research looks at the role of a thematic curriculum based on social concerns and social issues of the students, ultimately engaging their interests and changing their responses of "so what", "who cares', "whatever" , through the theme of pop art (p. 56). When Cummings engaged students in conversations of personal interest and relevance, the individual behaviors and attitudes of her adolescent students changed (p. 60).These scholars have made similar discoveries about the "atrophication of the artistic expression" (Amorino, 2009, p. 214) in adolescents participants.

Supporting Students with Emotional Disabilities

Reaching and Teaching Students with Special Needs through Art, written by Gerber and Guay (2006) which served as the primary text book during the researcher's graduate course in

special education, provides the scholarly framework for this research topic. Guay (2006) believes in the effects of an art education that can offer "students with emotional/behavioral problems a socially appropriate outlet for their feelings" (p. 44). Artwork may be a better mode for some students to express their feelings and visual storytelling may be the means through which issues and problems are channeled.

In addition to the art classroom being a place where students with emotional disabilities can express concerns, it is also a place where art teachers can support their exploration of personal identities. Solar (2011) recognizes the important distinction that students with emotional or behavioral disabilities (EBD) have to manage their disability on top of the "normal challenges that are associated with adolescent experiences, hormonal changes, and feelings" and that they have a "greater difficulty developing a positive and healthy identity"(pp. 41-2).

Guay (2006) points to an undesirable student behavior being a form of communication (p. 44). If a student acts out it might be because they are frustrated by a classroom task. Solar (2011) warns that the teacher be cautious interpreting student responses to lesson prompts. Dismissive answers from students such as "why" questions might actually be "how" questions because students with emotional disabilities may not be capable of expressing or communicating their level of understanding or frustration (p. 42). Sometimes a student behavior may look as though they aren't interested in participating, when in fact they aren't clear as to what is being asked of them or how they should do it.

Students with emotional disabilities sometimes have a difficult time accessing an education, however, by "praising students' skills, capitalizing on successes, and reinforcing student achievements, the art classroom can be a safe, fostering environment for all students to learn about themselves" (Guay, 2006). Solar's (2011) message for educators is to never give up

on students. These students may verbally or silently deny effort, but if the teacher is consistent in response and support, they will excel (p. 45).

Meaning-Making through Storytelling

The theories within storytelling are vast and extensive. However, scholarly literature shows that storytelling is a theme worth exploring in the classroom. For the purposes of this research study, the scholarly research of Hamilton and Weiss (2007), Olson (1998), and Zander (2007) has been used as the foundation for understanding storytelling. Each speaks to the power and significance of integrating storytelling in the classroom of any discipline.

Zander's (2007) definition of "narrative opportunities in art" includes "stories that students have about their own art, the stories that teachers have about their own experiences with art, the stories of artists, and interpretations of the artwork itself" (p. 192). This all-encompassing definition was used to develop the research study which included the student participants, teacher, and artist narrative exemplars.

Hamilton and Weiss (2007), discuss storytelling in their book, *Children Tell Stories*, as a method of enriching emotional development. Their extensive research in the field has revealed that "stories foster the development of children's inner resources and provide them with message that can help them deal with problems in their lives" (p. 20). Zander (2007) concludes her article by emphasizing the importance of sharing stories as a method to learning "who we are and what we will become" (p. 288). Storytelling can be used as a tool to develop emotionally and to discover identities of the present and future.

If storytelling is an outlet for students with emotional disabilities to express their problems, it's plausible that the content will present concerns for the teacher. Olson (1998)

addresses this concept by suggesting “censorship of subject matter or the avoidance of troublesome issues… are [sic] not appropriate solutions, especially if we agree that every student deserves to be known” (p.196). There will be instances when the subject matter is objectionable, "but to ignore the relationship between story and art is to risk removing the human dimension from art" (p. 197).

Conclusion

Olson (1998) asks, “if teachers do not show interest in the lives and stories of their students, if they do not encourage students to tell their stories, are they then suggesting that the students and their lives are not particularly important?” (p. 168). The research study is in response to the researcher’s experience that students at the Frost School are capable of informal storytelling but inhibited in the context of the art classroom. It is the belief of the researcher that the act of storytelling (visual or verbal), when framed so that students can better understand it, can be used to illustrate to students that they have a story worthy of sharing.

Tacit Understanding

Solar (2011) claims students with an emotional or behavioral disability (EBD) “are sometimes judged or feared based on their label before teachers even meet them…but they should never be feared. They have more ‘loops’ in their rollercoaster ride of adolescent life than the average teenager” (p. 40). This was something the researcher could relate in the first few months of teaching students of this population and partially a reason for pursuing a story-themed curriculum study. She has come to learn over the past two years that students with emotional disabilities have complex, unique, and rich identities.

The researcher has attempted in the past to integrate storytelling in the art classroom, but with little success, followed by a period of avoidance. Several factors potentially contribute to the disengaged and resistant responses of the students. Perhaps their lack of energy and enthusiasm is due to a misunderstanding: the students don't fully understand what a story is or what it looks like in visual form. When they respond with "why", they really mean "how". The lack of clearly defined visual exemplars and artist narratives used to clarify what is meant by a visual story might be another explanation for the dismissive responses. Another theory is that the students are not personally connected or interested in the type of story that they are being encouraged to share. When adolescent students with emotional disabilities are not connected or interested in subject matters, the teacher can't expect them to be fully invested. Finally, adolescent students with emotional disabilities might be hesitant to share their visual stories as a result of fears, self-doubt, and negative identity constructions, which might be better realized through story constructions.

Theoretical Understanding

The scholarly references and literature presented above in the review of literature support the notion that storytelling has an important place in the development and well-being of adolescent students. Olson (1998, 2003) believes in a student-centered education where the interests of the student are foremost addressed. This is echoed in the work of Amorino (2009), Hafeli (2008), and Cummings (2010) who have specifically looked at adolescent responses, or lack thereof, in the art classroom. The research of Gerber and Guay (2006) and Solar (2011) is specific to the special education population and shows that students with emotional disabilities are capable of engaging and making meaningful discoveries through art when appropriately supported by their teachers. Although no studies were found relating storytelling methodologies

to the research participant population, significant studies such as Hamilton and Weiss (2005), Olson (1998), and Zander (2007) show how integrating storytelling as an overall theme in the classroom has positive outcomes. The overarching theory presented in this chapter supports the research study described in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Chapter Three will discuss the design of the study, information that was gathered in response to the research question, and the methods used to collect data. Additionally, the methods used to analyze the collected information, connecting and categorizing strategies, will be outlined. The methodology of the classroom-based action research has been informed by a combination of the student participants and by the time constraints of the research period. In the sections below these two factors will be discussed in relationship to the methods of data collection and the storytelling lesson which will be presented to the student participants as the action of the research.

Design of the Study

In this action research study, the art classroom was used as a primary source to collect data. Five adolescent students with emotional disabilities who attend Art Fundamental courses at the Frost School in Maryland were participants. A storytelling-themed lesson was presented to the student participants over an eight day period, depending on the specific class schedule and student attendance. The storytelling lessons were presented to the students to see how they might construct their own visual personal stories. The goal of presenting storytelling lessons, which included sharing visual exemplar prompts and artist narratives, was to engage student interests and increase their overall level of participation.

Research Methods

Several methods were used to collect data in order to ensure objectivity and reduce researcher bias. Participation required students to volunteer their time for interviews and surveys, as well as their art for visual data. Additional data collection included daily

participation points and warm-up responses, researcher memos, and field notes. The data collected reflects informal observations of behavior to include a behavioral point system, scheduled interactions with participants such as interviews and surveys, and daily documentation throughout the research time period to include photographing art and warm-up activities. Details of these three categories of data collection are specified in the sections to follow.

Observation of behaviors.

An online point system, Classroom Dojo, was used daily throughout the research study to document student behaviors. The primary goal of the established point system was to look for increased levels of engagement and participation. Classroom Dojo is a software tool that is already established as a system for teachers at the Frost school to record behaviors. The Classroom Dojo is projected on the classroom screen daily so that students can visualize their success in a particular class. There are six positive and five negative categories that address all behaviors specific to the Frost School students. There are subcategories under each which are not specifically recorded in the system, but were noted by the researcher in the field notes.

For the purpose of this research study, the Classroom Dojo was used during and directly following class sessions to record behaviors. The three positive categories that were analyzed include following classroom procedures, being an active learner, and being engaged. The four negative behaviors that correspond and are relative to the research include: disengagement, verbal disruption, physical disruption, and disregarding the rules (see Appendix A1. p 75).

Observation field notes and reflective memos were maintained by the researcher to record the above-mentioned behaviors. Specific student behavior examples of interest and noted in the field notes include: attending class and staying in class as opposed to using the Quiet Room or

staying in the homeroom class, completing work and starting tasks without excessive amounts of prompting, staying on task with little distraction from artwork, and being conscientious and paying attention to consistency of work rather than rushing to complete work. The Support Counselor who manages student records when he/she leaves an assigned class will provide this information, as well as attendance records. The reflective memos were used in addition to the field notes as a place to document ideas related to improving the research study.

Scheduled interactions with student participants.

Students were aware of their involvement as research participants during two scheduled methods of research: the participant survey and the student interview. The researcher asked students to complete a participant survey on Friday, November 2nd , prior to the lesson presentations. The participant survey was a narrative response to their understanding of a story. The goal of the survey was to gather students' understanding of the definition of storytelling. Students were asked to write responses to the question prompts: What is a story? When do you tell stories? What role do you think storytelling can have in the art classroom? Do you know any artists who are storytellers? How are these two related? Students were given the option to type their answers to ensure anonymity, although most students opted to sign their name. The narrative open-ended method was chosen because it was hopeful that student answers will reveal more about their understanding of story than would be in a question specific format. Maxwell (2013) encourages researchers to ask "*real* questions, ones to which you are genuinely interested in the answer, rather than contrived questions designed to elicit particular sorts of data" (p. 101). He claims that by doing so, the researcher allows for the formation of "collaborative and symmetrical relationships" with the interviewees so that they are able to "bring their knowledge to bear on the questions in ways that you might never have anticipated" (p. 101).

The researcher conducted a student participant interview following the lesson presentations. The interview was a forum for student participants to express ideas and concerns related to a series of open-ended guided questions that they might not be able to express as clearly on paper. Because time in the classroom during the designated period of research was short, the interview was primarily conducted during Resource, a Frost period at the end of the day to allow students to complete school work and meet with their teachers. The interview took place on Friday, November 16th. An audio-recorder was used during the interview process to ensure accurate interpretation which was later transcribed word-for-word by the researcher.

A goal of the interview was to obtain a measure of students' understanding of how stories are shared through the visual arts. A second set of questions reflected perceptions of artwork and artists and the relevance of knowing the stories related to them. Included in the artist dialogue was the students' response to the teacher's sharing of personal stories through her art and artist narrative. Questions also reflected their understanding and definition of storytelling, and how it has evolved since the survey responses (see Appendix A2. p 79).

Daily documentation.

Throughout the case-study daily documentation was gathered based on student warm-up responses and photographs were taken to observe student artwork. In addition to these routine practices, observation field notes were recorded daily and were integral to gathering information related to the research study. The researcher completed brief notes in between classes and during the beginning of class when students completed the daily warm-ups. During 5th period planning the researcher expanded on the notes to include student responses, levels of engagement, observed behaviors (as mentioned above), and comments related to the art criteria rubric.

Adolescent students currently enrolled in Art Fundamental classes are required daily to respond to journal questions in their personal Notesketches. This practice has been established as a method to present or review lesson material as questions are related to the concepts of the current lesson plan. The student participants continued to respond to daily warm-ups during the research study period which was used to guide students' thinking and brainstorming for the production phases. The researcher photographed daily entries as an easy and accurate method to record student responses.

After each sequence of production the researcher photographed student artwork to document it. All art produced in the classroom served as documentation, including process art such as thumbnail sketches, considering final products could not be developed given the research time constraints. Field notes were used to record observations related to the student art. A criteria rubric was used to guide observations and to analyze the student art related to the goals of the research question (see Appendix A3. p.80).

Technology usage.

The collection of data and the method of presenting the lessons required the use of technology. As discussed above in the observation of student behavior section, an online software program, Classroom Dojo was used throughout the research. This required a connection to the internet and was also accessed by the researcher using an iPhone application. An Excel spreadsheet, PDF files, and the program Inspiration was used to organize the data collected.

In addition to using the iPhone for participation and behavior points and as a camera, the iPhone was used to record student responses during the interview. It was decided to use the voice recorder app because the researcher had recorded responses from Frost students in the past

and students had not objected to its use, nor had it appeared to make them uncomfortable. However, after the researcher explained its purpose to the individual student participants they were given an option based on their level of comfort.

Based on the researcher's previous experiences, prior to the research study, it was decided that video-recording devices would not be used to collect data because many students at the Frost School are uncomfortable with photographs and video cameras. This decision was also based on the concern that the researcher did not want to bring added attention to the research study and prioritizes the confidentiality of the student participants. Individual student permissions were sought during the interview process. Four of the five students agreed to participate. Permission was not required by the school because students will remain anonymous and the verbal data will be shared only as copied text identified as "Student A", etc….

A digital camera (Nikon D3100) and the iPhone were used to photograph student art. This camera is already in the art classroom as part of the classroom media and available for use throughout the research. Power point presentations were used as a system for organizing and presenting warm-up questions, visual exemplars, artist narratives, and lesson objectives. The lessons required students to view videos from TED as a method of learning about an artist narrative. A Bright Links display system was used to project all material and exemplars related to the lesson presentations. It is a method students are already used to following and therefore did not require that students adjust to a new system, which would have otherwise impacted the research results.

Data Collection

The methods used to collect data outlined in the above sections have been established in relationship to the lessons that were presented by the researcher. Keeping in mind the research goals, the classroom-based research and the development of lesson objectives reflected the environment that the research would be conducted in, the student participants, and scheduling/time restraints. These factors are discussed below in more detailed followed by a description of the lesson plans which were presented to collect the data.

The Frost School environment.

The Frost School is a special education non-public school system comprised of three different programs, each with their own therapeutic and academic philosophies. The Frost School programs serve the needs of students with autism and emotional disabilities ranging in age from seven to twenty-one years-old. Students attending the Frost School have been sent from counties throughout Maryland and Virginia, as well as the District of Columbia. For the majority of students, the Frost School serves as a temporary academic setting for them to work on individual and family problems related to their disabilities; ultimately the goal is for them to transition or mainstream to the public school system. The Frost School programs provide a least restrictive environment for students seeking a high school diploma and offer a therapeutic environment for students to work on goals related to their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

A typical day at the Frost School is not unlike other school settings in that the students attend classes based on their course requirements and follow a schedule of six periods. However, class sizes range from two to eight students on average and additional classroom resources and adaptations are made to support student successes. Regular breaks are provided

for students who need them. A Quiet Room, support counselors, and therapists are available to students to process set-backs and emotional challenges. Individual and group therapy sessions take place intermittently throughout the day, depending on the student's schedule. In addition to the classroom teacher, paraeducators at the Frost School also play an integral role in the students' lives. Many of the students at the Frost School, as specified on their IEPs, are accompanied throughout the day by educational assistants whose job it is to keep students on track and ensure their academic success and safety.

Student participants.

For the purposes of this research study, five adolescent students with emotional disabilities, ages 15 to 18, in the three Art Fundamental courses offered by the researcher, were asked to participate. The classes are offered 2nd, 3rd, and 4th periods and include students from two of the three high school programs. None of the students are identified in the research paper by their real names for confidentiality purposes nor should it be obvious from an outsider perspective which responses came from a particular student. Because of this fact, parent and student permission was not required. While students were made aware of the research, it's not something the researcher expanded on with them for several reasons that relate to the student's protection and integrity of the research. The researcher did not want to disturb the consistency of the established classroom procedures nor does she want to stress the research agenda in fear that it may evoke unnecessary anxiety and attention, which may have upset the students and interfered with the research data. The researcher wanted the student participants to feel safe and comfortable as opposed to providing them with a reason to feel paranoid about the level to which their responses were being studied and recorded. The researcher's goal was to blend the research study and the data collection seamlessly with established classroom practices.

Scheduling demands.

Based on the Frost School schedule, during the weeks of November 2nd and November 16th, the researcher met with the five students at most five days. The inconsistency of class periods during this time was a result of Group Therapy, which is regularly scheduled on Tuesdays, and Work Day scheduled every Thursday. There was a Professional Day on Monday, November 5th and no school on Tuesday, November 6th due to elections. There was a half-day on Wednesday, November 7th for treatment reviews. A school-wide hallway competition which took place on Thursday, November 11th was another interruption to the research schedule. It was announced last minute to the Frost staff and not an activity that the art teacher could opt out of participating and she was expected to help organize and develop ideas. In addition to the scheduling conflicts, student attendance varied based on emotional availability, unexcused and excused absences, and other external and internal concerns. Many of these schedule constraints are addressed in Chapter One under the Limitations of the Study.

Lesson presentation.

The lessons were designed to reflect the student population, scheduling constraints, and the goal of the research study. The primary question to be explored was how Frost students might respond and construct personal stories when prompted with a visual exemplar and an artist narrative as opposed to only a visual exemplar. There are endless examples of storytelling in art that could have been presented. The chosen examples were selected for many reasons and integrated well into what was currently being studied in the classes. The researcher sees ways of expanding on the concepts learned from the research lessons beyond the research timeframe.

The researcher presented one storytelling lesson which included a visual exemplar and an artist narrative. The researcher also presented her own art and shared a story related to the lessons because the teacher narrative was part of the research questions. The contemporary video artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo was presented as an exemplar and inspiration for storytelling constructions. This lesson required a personal exploration and self-identification through a shared visual story. The sequence for the lesson presentation followed this format:

- Shared visual exemplar
- Students created a series of thumbnail sketches to present ideas
- Presented story of artist through video presentation
- Asked students to look at thumbnail sketches and make changes or additions based on new information
- Teacher shared own art and story related to exemplar
- Completed and made adjustments to visual concepts and shared with class

Students were asked to capture and preserve their memories, friendships, and family relationships based on the work of artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo. Students were asked to select and use gestures, postures, subjects, and/or objects to tell a story contained in a jar. They watched a TED video to learn more about how Gabriel Barcia-Colombo captures and preserves his personal stories and how his childhood interests have led to this process.

The lesson allowed for flexibility in the students' choices of media. Students were given the option to hand draw, collage, or use Photoshop as an artist's tool. Students were encouraged to choose materials which they were comfortable working because no new techniques were taught over the course of the research period. The goal was for students to construct stories, not to show excellence in the manipulation of materials.

The artwork students were asked to produce was more like a simple exercise than a lengthy project. There was little time to fully develop final projects due to the scheduling constraints. Only one to two class periods were devoted to the production of art. This is an adjustment from past established classroom projects as students are typically given longer periods of time to complete major projects (2-3 weeks) and are expected to write artist statements and complete rubrics following the production. The level to which students were expected to complete work was clearly defined and explained to the students so that they did not become overly concerned with the product. The researcher plans on developing the lessons beyond the research period so that students can build on the lessons learned and produce final artwork to be displayed.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey, interview, artwork, warm-up responses, participation points, and observed behaviors, in addition to informal conversations with students was analyzed for meaning. Throughout the research process, the researcher was looking for patterns in student behaviors related to the lesson presented, increased levels of engagement, artwork that reflects more effort and interest, and student responses to the narrative inquiry. All data collected was reviewed, reread, and organized at the beginning of the analysis. The researcher's use of field notes and memos as a reflective process was foremost important as a method of understanding the information collected and informed subsequent analysis.

The researcher chose to use connecting strategies, specifically narrative analysis, as a process to understand the data. This decision has been informed by the fact that the research data involves "juxtaposition in time and space, the influence of one thing on another…seeing actual *connections* between things, rather than similarities and differences" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 106).

The connecting strategy was used to analyze the narrative surveys, interviews, and daily warm-up responses. The researcher looked for relationships between data that connects statements (Maxwell, 2013, p. 113).

Additionally, categorizing strategies were utilized as a process of data analysis. The criteria established for observed behaviors (tracked through the point system & notes) and the artwork was used to group data into theoretical categories. Matrices were developed and structured to reflect the main research question and the three sub-questions. Finally, the researcher used the checklist of strategies proposed by Maxwell (2013, p. 125-9) to test the validity of the research.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results of the Study

The research study was conducted in order to discover how adolescent students with emotional disabilities might construct their own personal stories when provided with storytelling visual exemplars and artist narratives. The focus of the study was to examine whether a story-themed lesson plan might engage student interests, contribute to increased participation in the art classroom, and motivate students to create and share their own meaningful visual stories. The classroom-based research was conducted in Art Fundamental high school classes at the Frost School in Maryland and involved five student participants. A storytelling-themed lesson plan which included the contemporary art of Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, as well as the teacher's was presented over eight days. Data was gathered in the form of narrative surveys, artwork, warm-up responses, behavior points, interviews, and researcher memos and field notes. The data was analyzed for meaning and the results are discussed in the Chapter sections to follow.

Significance of the Study

The researcher used a method of triangulation to gather the results of the data and organized all sources collected so that it could be analyzed for significant patterns. This process made it possible to cross-reference findings and tally incidences pointing to a particular theme, so that the researcher could be confident that the evidence was consistent. While all of the sources of information were evaluated and reviewed for a given theory, the students' written and verbal responses and the teacher's daily field notes offered the richest source of evidential data. The findings reported below represent only the substantial results of the research both significant and secondary that can be confirmed across all sources of data collected.

The researcher was surprised to discover through the study that none of the student participants resisted telling their own personal story, but rather were deeply engaged throughout the research period. Considering the researcher had previously been hesitant to present lessons that prompted students with emotional disabilities to share personal and meaningful events through visual stories, the results of the study are significant. The findings support and confirm the scholarly literature discussed in Chapter Two regarding the significance of providing adolescent students with opportunities to make meaningful works of art and integrating storytelling as a method of engaging student interests.

The results show that students had their own ideas for their visual concepts and although the artist examples offered a visual reference, the success of their engagement was due to their own inquiries of personal relevance. The research work of Hafeli (2008) and Cummings (2010) points to the importance of engaging adolescent students in topics of personal interest and relevance for their own artistic and personal discoveries. The visual concept constructions provided students within the theme of storytelling with a context from which to make their work personal. A storytelling lesson provided a method of having students share more about who they are which can improve teaching understanding of students and strengthen the teacher-student relationship. Janet Olson's (1998) research points to this significant finding stating that "if educators cannot make realistic connections to the lives and stories of their students, their students will never reach their full potential as learners (p. 193).

The results of the study also confirm what other researchers and art educators have written about the value of storytelling in the art classroom (Olson 1998 and Zander 2007). Janet Olson (1998) also addresses the fact that it is not reason enough for a teacher to avoid storytelling-themed curricula in the art classroom in fear of questionable subjects or emotionally

charged stories (p. 196). Seen in this research study several students chose to tell the stories of recent losses. The art classroom became a way for the students to express their own experiences. According to Olson, "when placed appropriately in an educational environment, these narratives become powerful learning tools" (p. 197).

The research experience has guided the researcher to analyze and restructure her approach to teaching. As opposed to avoiding certain subjects, the hands-on research experience reveals to the researcher the importance of offering narrative opportunities in a safe and supported way for students to express themselves. The research results present solutions for organizing future curricula, for developing concepts related to personal storytelling, and for structuring the art classroom environment. Finally, it is expected that the results of the study will contribute to the continual growth and understanding of the teacher/student dynamic and the researcher's overall teaching philosophy.

Validity and Bias

The research was conducted as designed and the results reported are believed to be an accurate reflection of the classroom-based study. The researcher, to the best of her knowledge, has presented the information throughout the study, both to students during the lesson and also in her reports, in an unbiased way.

The interview responses from students used in the results are a credible account of students' beliefs and thinking. Students were made aware of the researcher's purpose for conducting the interview, given the option to participate, and provided with ample time to respond to the questions. One student, although verbally confirmed she would participate, was not in a good place when the interview began, so the researcher decided it was best not to

involve her. This decision was one the researcher could make because she has an established relationship with the student and other participants due to small class sizes and the nature of the therapeutic Frost School environment. Although each student was asked the same series of questions, in some instances, the researcher had to ask additional questions to confirm responses and elucidate ideas. Interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed for word-for-word clarity and validity purposes. All recorded notes were made either during the class or immediately following the class period so that researcher did not rely on memory to record observations. Additionally, data was triangulated so that patterns and connections were made across all sources as opposed to relying on only one source of data for a particular result.

Data Analysis Procedure

The software program Inspiration was used as the primary tool for visualizing the range of data collected daily throughout the research study. Because Inspiration is a program that uses graphic organizers and has visual mapping capabilities, eight categories corresponding to the data collected were established on a daily grid that related to each of the student participants. These categories included: date/attendance, lesson plan, individual student notes, behavior points, memos, warm-up responses, and student art.

Prior to collecting data in the classroom, the researcher organized document templates for daily field notes and memos and a spreadsheet for inserting specific comments related to the students' daily behavior points. Following the completion of the study, these written descriptions were pasted into the corresponding student text boxes on the day that they occurred. Photographs taken of the narrative surveys, daily warm-up assignments, and the art work were also inserted into the daily framework as images. This method provided a visual snapshot of the research, so that the researcher could maintain an organized system for making more sense of the

data collected across three different periods. Inspiration's moveable components made it possible to easily format, sort, and reorganize the initial categories of information, both text and images, so that the researcher could to begin to analyze them.

Once the visual overview was established, the researcher created several documents that allowed for the data to be more clearly read. Behavior notes were compiled from text boxes into a separate document, as were all field notes, memos, and individual student notes. Student interviews were transcribed from the voice recordings and formatted into a text file organized by student participants. Transcriptions of the student interviews and criteria rubrics to analyze student artwork were noted on the date they occurred on the Inspiration graph, however, details were maintained in a separate document. Once printed, all of the above mentioned text documents and images were reread several times by the researcher while making note of significant discoveries, themes, and repeating patterns found.

After rereading all of the data, categorizing analysis matrices were structured in terms of the research question and sub-questions and potential themes as a method to better understand the patterns that emerged. In some matrixes both visual images and text were combined. Additionally, tables were used to organize elements of the data results to show patterns and relationships. The results of the tables, matrices, and other significant findings of the analyzed data are discussed in the following section and may be found in both the report document and in Appendices B1 – B6.

Results of Data Analysis

The following sections outline the results and discoveries made after analyzing the data collected.

Student Definitions and Constructions of Storytelling

Prior to the presentation of the storytelling lesson, the researcher asked student participants to complete two written activities. The goal of the first written response, a narrative survey, was for students to put into their own words their understanding of the definition of storytelling by developing two paragraphs in response to a series of prompts. Although students were given the option to remain anonymous, four out of the five chose to sign their name. Students were provided with an open-ended method of responding to the six questions (listed below) so that they could reveal more about their understanding of a story.

- What is a story?
- When do people tell stories?
- When do you tell stories?
- What role do you think storytelling can have in the art classroom?
- Do you know any artists who are storytellers?
- How are art and storytelling related?

Narrative survey responses.

The researcher used the student responses as a baseline to evaluate how students' definitions and understandings might evolve as concepts were presented to them over the course of the research study. Considering that the definition of a story can be defined and interpreted in infinite ways and it is an extensive concept for anyone to thoroughly sum up, it was not surprising to find that each student had a different understanding of what a story is based on his/her experiences. All student survey responses were photographed and images may be referenced in Figures 4.1 - 4.5 (see Appendix B1 – B3. p 85 - 87).

The first significant point of interest noted by the researcher was that students responded positively to the activity as seen through their responses. Based on past experiences, the researcher was encouraged by the fact that students didn't argue about completing a written assignment of this length, rather appeared eager to complete the task when it was explained. Student B, who often struggles to complete assigned work, wrote in the first line of her survey answer, "what a good question, so I must answer". Student C creatively engaged and responded to the questions by formatting her narrative response into a story itself.

While all of the responses revealed a perception of storytelling as positive, answers reflected variations on a learned or heard definition from previous experiences with the subject. Three of the five students in their narrative responses made a connection to stories, bedtime, and children. When asked when stories are told, student responses included: "stories are the things you fall asleep to… and it's something you read to tell your children about", "sometimes to their children before bed", and "when my little brother or little nephew asks me to read them a bed time story". Some of the answers reflected a prescribed definition, as if the student had been asked to memorize the definition of storytelling in an academic class. Student C's response reflects an English definition: "a story is a happening in which is included an introduction, rising action, plot, falling action, and an ending". Two students chose to include images in their narratives. Even though these students made the connection to other forms of storytelling such as drawing, sculptures, and music, they still chose to depict it as either a book or as an illustration on the cover of a book. Also worth noting was students' use of familiar phrases or slight variations of these to define the relationship between storytelling and art. One student claimed, "if a story is worth a thousand words that that picture can tell a story of what happen". Another student wrote, "a picture holds more than 1000 words".

Not all students were able to make a clear connection between art and storytelling in their written responses. Two students responded that there was no relationship between art and storytelling, although other aspects of their narrative illustrate otherwise. For example, the same student who stated that storytelling and art are not related also wrote, "I think storytelling has a role in the art classroom with the pictures because they tell a story why the artist drew them". The majority of the narrative survey responses revealed inconsistencies and misunderstandings pointing to the fact that there was room for students to learn more about the subject of stories related to art and artists.

Daily warm-up responses.

The second written activity that students were asked to complete took place on the first day of the lesson presentation, prior to the researcher sharing both the visual exemplars and the artist narratives. It was the first warm-up response of six that was assigned over the course of the research period. The first question required students to identify a personal experience or memory that they were interested in preserving and to describe how they would go about illustrating it. Four of the five students appeared to immediately know the answer to the questions. Field notes from the first day of the lesson presentation for the 3rd period class reveal, to the researchers' delight that, "Students B and C seemed very clear regarding what subject, family/dog memory they wanted to preserve - there was little hesitation". The only student who struggled at first to answer the question was eventually able to develop a response once the researcher offered some suggestions. The researcher's field notes documenting this exchange read, "at first he said he had no memories that he wants to preserve. I suggested hitting a home run during a baseball game. His eyes lit up a bit." All five students' responses to the warm-up,

their visual concept constructions, and statements about their concepts may be seen in Figures 4.6 - 4.10 (see Appendix B4- B6. p 89 -90).

Initial responses to the storytelling exemplar.

A Power Point Presentation titled "Storytelling in Art – Using Jars To Do So" was presented to illustrate the metaphor of using a vessel to preserve a valued memory or personal story. The idea for preserving memories in jars stemmed from the featured visual exemplar and narrative about the artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo whose contemporary art involves video projections onto jars and other transparent objects.

All students contributed to the discussion that took place and made connections to their own life experiences as images were shown of jars for brainstorming purposes. Two students "made mention of their comments the previous Friday when they wrote their narrative surveys" and one student "readily offered up the idea to store candies" (field notes) in jars as the discussion took place. It was not until later, during the construction phase, that the researcher realized this student was making a connection to her father's love of chocolate candies, which he stored in jars. This student chose to memorialize her father, who she recently lost to a devastating disease, in her visual concept using three jars to represent his favorite things (see Figure 4.8 in Appendix B5, p 89).

Field notes on the first day of the lesson presentation reveal the researcher's delight that students were excited about the theme-based curricula:

> The students appeared eager to start a new lesson and appeared already interest in the concept of storytelling…. Students B and C both gathered around the drafting table and

> contributed often to the discussion regarding the 'jar' power point. They were engaged and wanted to continue the discussion with me about their ideas, even after the bell rang.

Students were able to make connections to the presentation and were consistently engaged. The researcher made a note after observing Student D's response to the Power Point, which reveals:

> He was very insightful – offered the suggestion of using jars to tell stories through music –made a connection between music and stories…. Student D tends to be scattered in his thoughts and very ADHD – he was focused throughout the PP and asked reasonable questions.

Clarification between visual exemplar and artist narratives.

The research question and corresponding lesson plan was designed to compare how adolescent students might construct personal stories when prompted with just a visual exemplar as opposed to both a visual exemplar and an artist narrative. The artist narrative differed from the visual exemplar in that it was not merely an image projected on the screen or hung for display, but rather was a biographical story told by the artist. Moreover, the distinction between the visual exemplar and the artist narrative was the story told about the work of art, providing students with a verbal translation of the story that might not be apparent to them otherwise. A TED video was used to share the artist narrative of Gabriel Barcia-Colombo to learn more about how he captures and preserves his personal stories and how his childhood interests have led to this process. Figures 4.11 and 4.12 below further illustrate the distinction between the visual example and artist narrative.

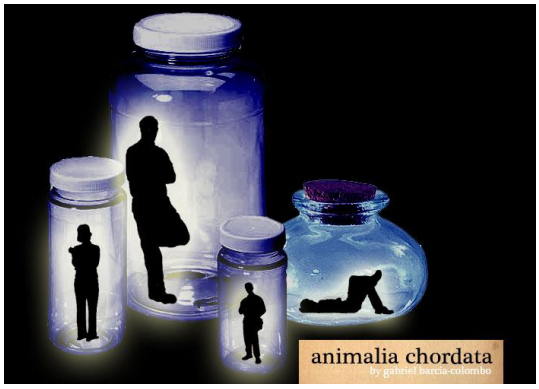

Figure 4.11: Visual Exemplar

Figure 4.12: Still of Artist Narrative

Description of student task to construct visual concepts.

After presenting the initial visual exemplar, created by artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, students were asked to develop visual concepts in the form of quick visual studies to express how they would tell a story about preserving a memory in a jar. Because the researcher knew that there would be little time to complete the art projects, it was stressed to the student participants that the objective of the assignment was ideas over product. Their goal was to present a series of visual concepts related to the objective of preserving a memory, not to produce a skillful masterpiece. Considering several weeks are usually devoted to the completion of an assignment, students were made aware of completing the task within the given time frame.

Student constructions of personal significance.

Looking at the students' constructions of visual concepts and their accompanying responses, the results of the data show that four out of the five students responded to the visual problem by constructing a meaningful work of art of personal significance. Two of them memorialized a significant loss, one celebrated a success, and one recognized a past family event

that was worth remembering. When asked during the interview, all of the students who participated reported that they preferred to create a story with a deeper meaning.

Student B, who constructed a memorializing story about the recent loss of her dog, claimed in the interview, "…a lot of people express or tell stories of how they feel through art because it's easier to do it through art than to tell in words". Student C expressed that creating with a deeper meaning is a motivating factor. The researcher witnessed the emotional depth this student's visual concept signified. At one point in the lesson the student became tearful and the researcher was also deeply affected by her story as "Student C had me close to tears" (field notes). Another field note recognized, "both students chose very charged stories that had to do with recent losses. Perhaps this is their way of working through those losses".

The initial motivation for conducting the research study was based on the teacher's previous experiences of students' negative responses to the prompt of sharing their own stories. In the context of the research study, student participants, many of whom have struggled in the past to relate, were able to connect and use their own experiences to produce a work of narrative art. Even though the student participants' written and verbal definitions of storytelling differed in the details, data reveals that all five students understood the importance of personal significance and meaningful relevance to their own storytelling initiative.

Student commitments to original visual concepts.

In order to answer the primary research question, the original design required that students begin work on visual concepts prior to hearing the artist narrative, so that afterwards any changes that were made to their visual concepts could be measured (through process photographs) by the researcher. One student connected the warm-up question on the first day of

the lesson plan to the activity. "When asked to develop her ideas, she wondered if she could use the ones from her warm-up – my response 'of course, that was the intent. Her response was, 'I thought so' (field notes).

Of the five student participants four of them had a clear vision and were committed to the concept they were interested in preserving prior to being presented with examples. These students created their visual concepts based on their answer to the warm-up question with little to no evidence of the visual examples and artist narratives influencing their constructions. Three of the students did not delineate at all from their original idea. Student E responded in her first warm-up response that she wanted to illustrate an experience she had with her family at the beach. Her visual concept construction was a picture of a beach (see Figure 4.10). In Student E's description of her own work after its completion she wrote, "a memory I would like to preserve is the time me and my siblings went to the beach. It was fun drawing in the sand and playing in the ocean".

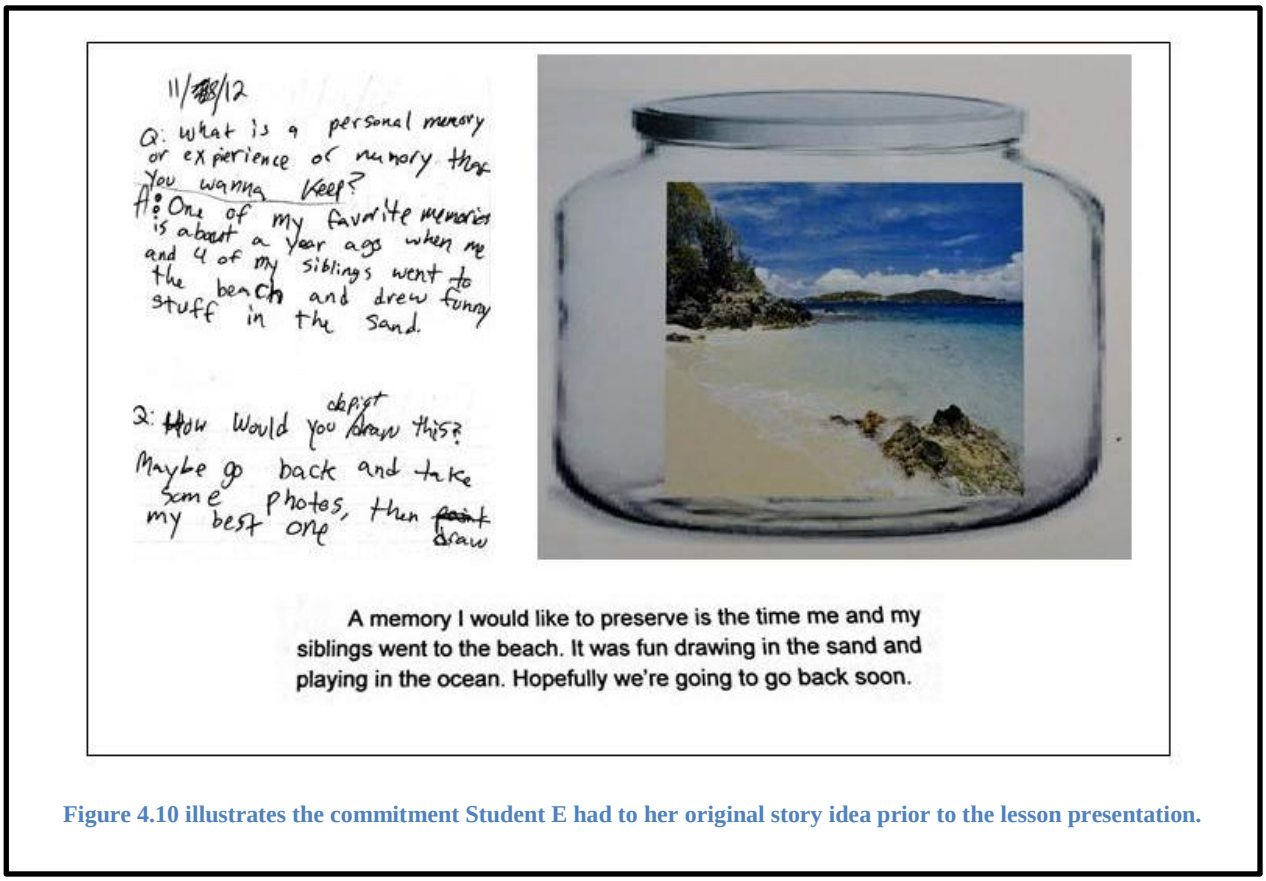

Figure 4.10 illustrates the commitment Student E had to her original story idea prior to the lesson presentation.

Although Student D originally wrote in his warm-up response that he wanted to preserve a memory about getting his learners permit, his visual construction of a new car was very close to the original concept. In his description he explained, "I made this picture because I got a new car for when I get my license I can drive it around".

Student participation and engagement in storytelling-theme lesson.

Storytelling is a subject in which all adolescent students in the research study had a basic understanding prior to its discussion as part of the art classroom curriculum. This was evident by their answers to the narrative survey and their responses to warm-up questions. Additionally, all students were able to contribute to the lesson presentations and group discussions consistently throughout the storytelling lesson, as well as create the visuals for their constructions. Behavior points documented throughout the research study were gathered daily to gauge whether students followed class procedures, were active learners, and were engaged in the lesson. Students could earn up to a total of three points each day the class was in session for participation, sharing, and engaging with the lesson/project. Table 4.1 below illustrates the relationship between attendance/class in session, possible points for engagement, and the total number of points students earned on a particular day.

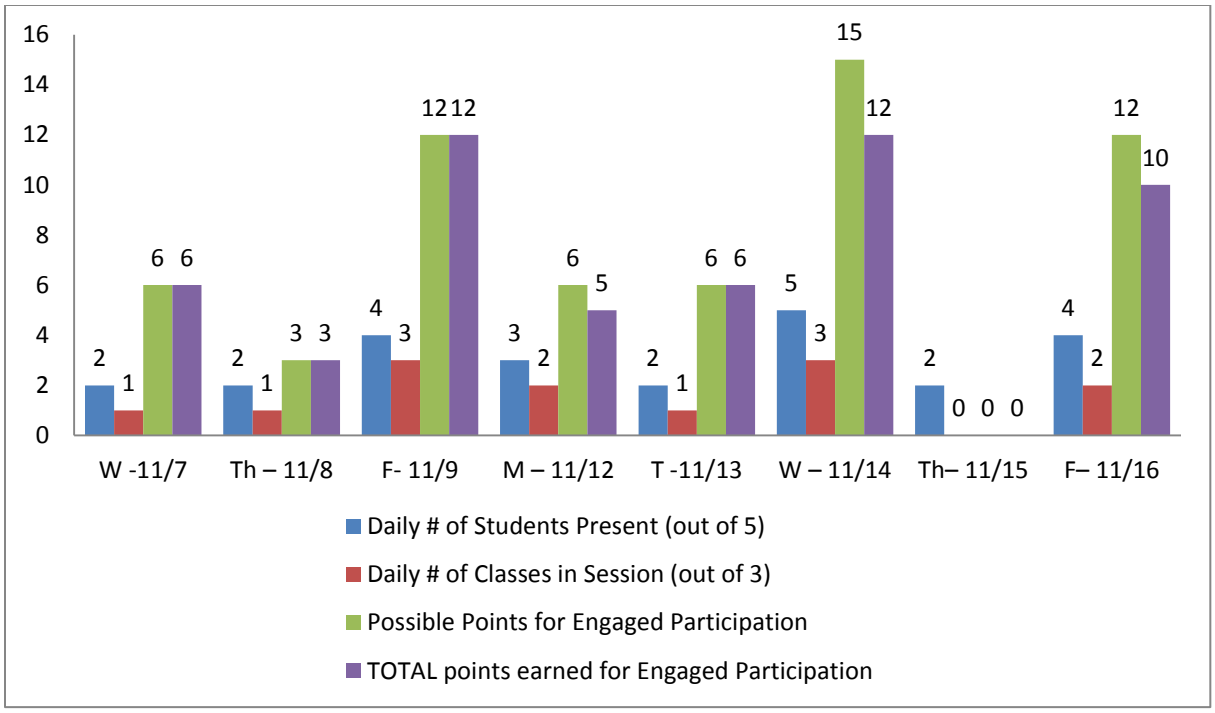

Table 4.1: Engagement Points

The total number of engagement points earned daily by all student participants illustrates their level of interest in the storytelling lesson.

On four out of the eight days, all students in attendance earned the maximum engagement/participation points, while the margin for the other four days was only short at most by three points. On Wednesday, November 14, when the participation of one student was lower than any other day, the researcher made mention of this student's behavior stating that "this was not her best class. I also know that the behaviors exhibited in my class were consistent throughout the day in other classes".

On two occasions the researcher's field notes make mention of Student B's overwhelming interest and participation in the project. During the production stage, Student B stated, "I'm actually liking this project-and you know that doesn't happen often". And on another

day she "communicated that the project provided her with a healthy distraction from other behaviors – anxiety, getting annoyed with other people (issues works on as goals in IEP)".

Four out of the five students wanted more time to work on their projects and were not content to create it as short exercise. On the second day of the lesson plan Student C addressed the researcher prior to class asking to extend the project because she wanted "to make it 3D and give it as a present to her mom for Christmas" (field notes). Additionally, the researcher decided to extend the lesson plan for the 2nd period class for the production phase because of student interests. According to her field notes regarding the lesson plan: "although the plan was to have them complete rough sketches, they really wanted to work on the project more". Particularly among the population of students studied, one in which students' cognitive abilities and levels of emotional stability grossly differ, the storytelling-theme curricula provided them with the opportunity to engage and participate because they all had a basic understanding and were able to relate personal experiences on some level.

Student Responses to Shared Artist Story

One goal of the research study was to discover the relevance and determine the level of influence on adolescent students' with emotional disabilities learning when introduced to visual exemplars and narrative stories of artists and their artwork. Students responded positively to the visual example created by the artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo and claimed to have benefited from it as a method for helping better visualize a solution to their own problem.

Student A's response to the TED video was particularly significant considering he often struggles to understand concepts that are presented to him. However, not only was he interested

in the storytelling-curriculum, he was also able to summarize the video for a therapist who inquired about what he was doing. The researcher documented her observation of this exchange:

> Therapist J asked what we were learning. Student A was able to relay objective of art project fairly accurately – especially as opposed to times in the past. I couldn't believe it. Also explained the work of artist Gabriel well. Mentioned lady in the blender, interactive quality of video art. Therapist J asked to see the TED video and Student A watched it again along with Therapist J as it was posted on the Bright Links.

Warm-up responses to the artist narrative.

Only one student in her warm-up answer had a negative response to the TED video about Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, claiming that "it was kinda boring" and that she was "very uninterested". One student admitted she wasn't at first sure how she felt about theartist but eventually had a change of heart. She stated that she "thought that this guy was weird but after he had explained his work it looked cool". She ultimately found the video to be "inspiring by the way the artist had captured his memories". Other positive warm-up responses that point to the students' understandings of the artist video related to the task include:

- "He did self-portraits to show his life and show his friends with emotions. Yes I liked his work of art because he made it fun".
- "I think it was a good metaphor of some of different ways that you can record and also store it for the future".
- "It's funny, like the lady in the blender best and it's a smart way of preserving memories".

Interview responses to the artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo.

At this point in the interview session, student responses were in reference only to the artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo and not to the teachers' shared story when asked about the visual examples and artist narratives. Students' responses to the teacher's story are addressed in the next session. When students were asked to describe how they felt about creating their own work after seeing the artist narrative, two of the students used positive statements such as "I felt good". The other two students who participated in the interview stated that they "really liked it" and "was excited".

However, when asked whether learning about a specific artist helped them to understand storytelling examples, students didn't clearly see the need. Student A, although reporting that it was helpful so that he could prepare for the project, didn't express a need to see the visual example to understand the concept. Student B also stressed how she enjoyed seeing the visual, but did not comment on the necessity of the example for clarifying storytelling examples. Student C's response was that "it wasn't totally useful, but it wasn't totally useless. It was just like, 'here's an example' and it helped in the way that how this guy was thinking".

Student responses to the teacher's story.

As part of a secondary research question, the researcher was also interested in learning about student responses to the teacher's shared visual exemplar and biographical narrative. The story was first shared as an example with little to no words. Then students were asked to speculate its meaning, after which the teacher proceeded to share her story and then a series of questions were exchanged between the teacher and students. The teacher's artwork (see Figure 4.13), a print, was created by the researcher in college during a time when she was experiencing

health-related problems and was constantly in the doctor's office or going through medical examinations. The figure in the jar represented an auto-biographical representation. The teacher/researcher chose to share this information with the students so that they she could explain the motivation for completing the work and so that she could reveal a little about her own personal story.

Figure 4.13: Teacher Story

The teacher shared with students a print she had made as a method for encouraging students to share their own visual stories.

When the teacher presented and shared her own work, the majority of the students showed interest in the story and in the fact that their teacher was also an artist. Students listened with curiosity to the teacher's story. The researcher's observation during one particular class documented student responses:

> Student B asked about the figure being naked. Student B interjected with how uncomfortable she feels with her male doctor. This was exactly where I was headed with my story. It was clear that I chose to depict a middle-aged science/doctor. I shared how uncomfortable it made me feel - always under examination and exposed. They all agreed that they understood the story. That the male figure makes sense and that the overall image read likes the story I shared with them.

During the 4th period class on another date, the researcher noted that Student E didn't at first make the connection between the visual image and the story, but that "she was surprised to learn that the print was my work". One of the students during the interview reflected that "when you told us the story and we looked at the paper it made a lot of sense. It really expressed the story without words".

Student interests in the teacher as artist.

Student B had to be reminded during the interview that she was introduced to two artists' work. She claimed, "other than the guy who we saw the video about, I don't remember learning about any other artists". The researcher asked, "what about me?" Student B responded with an enthusiastic "oh yeah" and giggled stating, "you told us your story for your jar. And I really like how you put yourself. Put someone actually holding the jar. Then put you next to the jar. I liked that". Student C was also took an interest in the visual aspects of the teacher's work of art, as well as the method that she chose to tell her story. During the class period when the image was first presented, she exhibited intrigue and wanted to know more about the teacher's portfolio. Comments from the researcher's field notes reveal this observation:

> Student C asked how I kept my art free of creases….She looked at the work closely. I shared how I store it in a portfolio. Student B and Student C wanted to know more and see the portfolio, as well as the contents.

Comparison of student responses to the two artist stories.

One of the secondary questions of the research study addressed how student responses to the teacher's story might compare to the responses of stories about artists who are less familiar. During the interview two out of the four students referenced the teacher's example as more helpful than that of Gabriel Barcia-Colombo's. Responding to the question "did you feel more prepared to create your own work when provided with a visual example?", Student B claimed, "I think more so when you started talking about it because the jar video was just jars….I think you explained it much better". Student C also stated that she believed the teacher's story was more useful for understanding the process. She clarified this point by explaining, "I think you made it much easier through that from doing, 'well, this is what I've done. This is my thought process. This is what you're going to do and I want you to think in guided questions'".

Three of the four students interviewed agreed that they related to the stories, two of whom specifically mentioned the teacher's story. Student C referenced the teacher's story stating:

> I think that, especially with yours, there's a life experience that many, many people would probably have… And I think, honestly, that I've had that same feeling. That when I first came to school, everyone was kind of like, 'what's going on with her? What's up with her, what's her situation?'… So, but yes, I think is your drawing-print, yes, it was easy to relate to.

Conclusions to student responses to shared artist stories.

Evidence pertaining to the student participants' perceptions and responses to the shared artwork and artists revealed that it provided them with a visual example but didn't further evolve their understanding of the concept of storytelling. While students claimed that the examples provided them with a method for seeing how ideas come into existence and they responded positively to learning about the artist stories, the examples weren't particularly essential to their personal constructions of visual concepts. Students had a clear visual path and were committed to their concepts of personal significance prior to the exemplars and narratives.

Student responses both during the lesson plan and later during the interview revealed students' interest in knowing more about their teacher as an artist. The researcher speculates that students' interest in the teacher's story and corresponding art might be due to the fact that teacher's art was not merely created as an example for the respective classroom project, as is usually the case. Rather, the work of art shared had personal significance for the teacher, created at a time when the title artist would have applied first as opposed to teacher. This concept might have been transferred to the student participants in the storytelling exchange.

When comparing students responses to contemporary artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo to the teacher, students responded more favorably to the teacher's story claiming that is was easier for them to relate to her story. This phenomenon may exist due to the fact that the students have a more personal relationship to the teacher. The teacher's artwork was a tangible example that students could closely examine as opposed to the video and digital images presented of an unfamiliar artist's work. Particularly for the population of students studied, viewing an actual work of art that can be closely speculated and touched might be a key aspect to increased intrigue.

Significant Constraints

A significant constraint of the research study that drastically challenged the gathering of data and the nature of the research study was the continual and regular interruptions to the daily lesson agenda due to scheduling conflicts, inconsistencies in student attendance, and in-class distractions. The researcher could not have perceived the number of changes needed to be made to the presentations and lesson plans throughout the allotted time, even after detailed planning and explicitly defining the limitations of the research study. In total, the following scheduled and non-scheduled conflicts negatively affected the classroom plans: Professional Day, Election Day, Work Day (2), Half Day, volleyball games (2), Hallway Decoration, Unexcused Absences (class avoidance, not in school), Excused (sick, Dr. Appointment), Tardiness, and Psych Testing. While each individual scheduling conflict in itself appeared harmless, when the events were added up over the course of a couple of weeks, the total interruption time to classes was significant and worthy of mention (see Table 4.2).

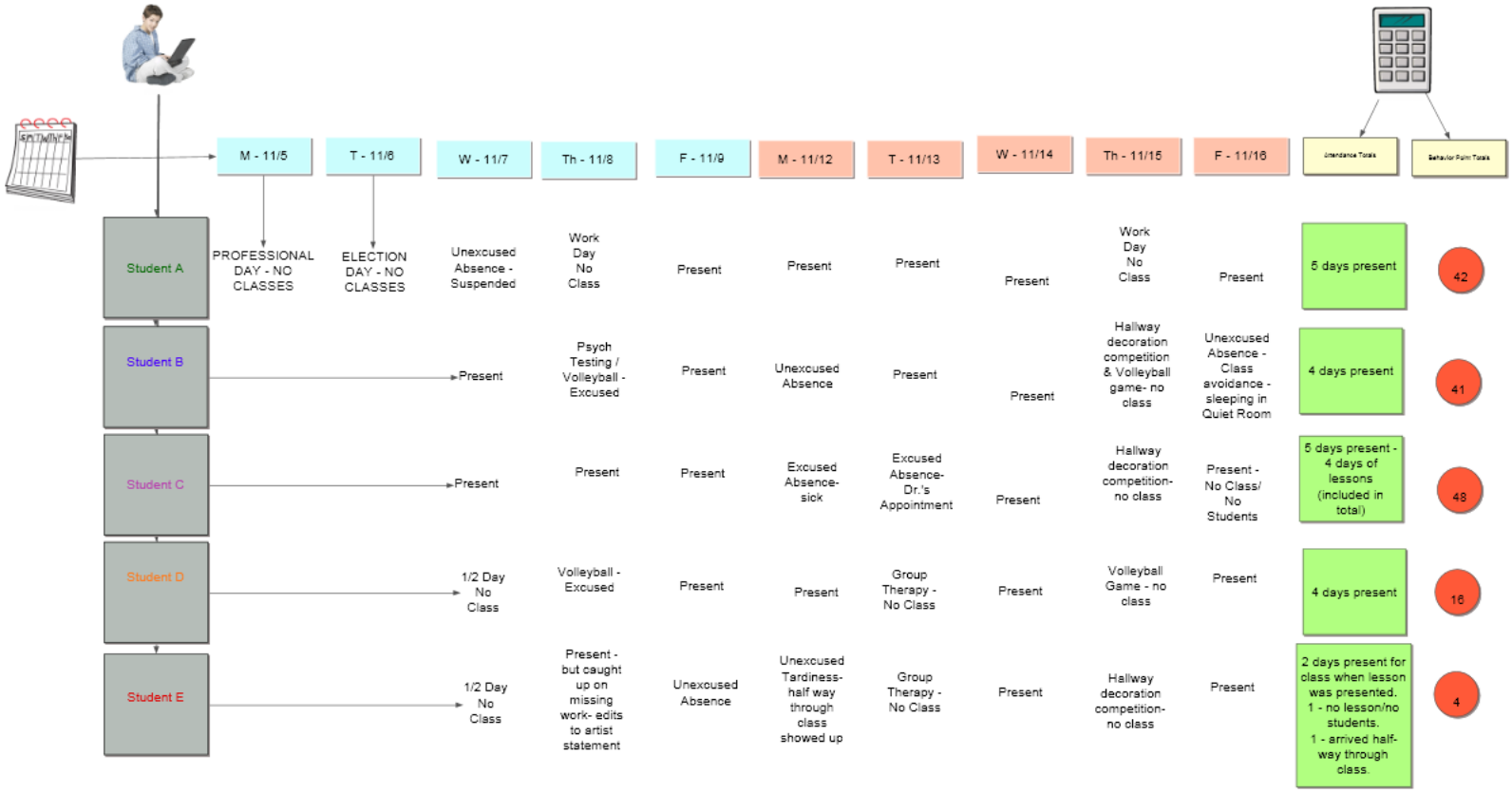

Table 4.2: Significant Constraints

Scheduling conflicts and attendance issues presented a significant constraint for the research study and student learning.

In-class interruptions and distractions.

Beyond the above mentioned interruptions due to school events and student absences, data revealed that the teacher had to make additional adjustments to the lesson plans to reflect in-class distractions beyond events marked on the calendar. These distractions fell into two categories: behaviors/student responses and visitors/other student agendas that effected presenting the lesson as planned. During one class period when a student was required to work independently on another subject, the researcher noted:

> Student Y was the biggest distraction. He was out of line and was causing the entire class to become frustrated with his responses/interactions with others. Because I spent most of the class managing behaviors I was never able to share my own art/story.

Additionally, there were five out of thirteen occurrences when adults and students from outside of the class roster effected how the lesson plan was presented. These occurrences involved other students who joined the art classroom to complete missing work, students who became the responsibility of the teacher due to teacher absences, and unannounced visitors. The researcher observed the effects of the interruptions on one day stating, "Student J's mom and another woman were visiting the class unannounced. Considering the environment and population of students, sometimes visitors can make it more difficult for students to share openly… didn't have students share their stories today." On another day the researcher commented, "today we couldn't [share] because Student J was late to class…. We needed to move along and not have him stuck on the issue of a Malibu." Student J is a student with autism and in order to avoid his obsession with the subject of the car and beach Malibu (used in his story construction) the teacher needed to move the class discussion to another topic. The shuffle

of activity in and out of the classroom and unexpected guests compromised the safe and sharing environment of the classroom for both the students and the teacher.

Teacher frustrations.

Although it was not part of the research goal to collect data showing the relationship between teacher attitudes and student successes, the data collected did reveal that such a relationship may exist. The scheduling conflicts, attendance issues, and routine interruptions presented a major source of frustration for the teacher affecting her level of enthusiasm for presenting the lessons. On six of the eight days of research the researcher made a comment in her field notes and memos regarding her level of frustration due to the scheduling/attendance phenomenon and distractions to teaching the lesson as planned. This is best summed up on the last day of the research in the following researcher memo:

> Once again, I am very frustrated by the constant movement and inconsistency of student attendance. There is rarely a day when I have all students present and at the same place in the lesson plan. There's a constant shuffling of activity from other students and teachers in my classroom, too. And the administration often does not plan far in advance or they expect us to just jump on board when an idea is presented….Lessons get lost, because ideas are constantly interrupted. Flexibility tends to be the key ingredient for teaching in this environment. I have had to rework the lesson plan numerous times….And I have had to rethink the lesson so that is better fits their needs and understandings…. the fact that they are all at different stages of the lesson plan has played a major role and compromised the integrity of the education.

Behavior points related to attendance.

Comparing the daily behavior points to the attendance records and calendar dates, the data reveals that the students with the lowest points also experienced the most inconsistent classes with the most interruptions. For example, Student E with the lowest points was absent five out of eight of the 4th period classes. This students' attendance coupled with the school-wide scheduling conflicts meant that she was only in class every other scheduled school day. Table 4.3 illustrates the relationship between the behavioral points earned and students' attendance. However, what the chart doesn't reveal is that some of the points marked zero are either not applicable or excused absences in which case points are not tallied. The data from this chart cannot be read exclusively without the other data collected from sources such as the researcher's field notes and behavior comments. The data would need to cover a more extensive period of time to show that a substantial pattern exists between attendance and behavioral points.

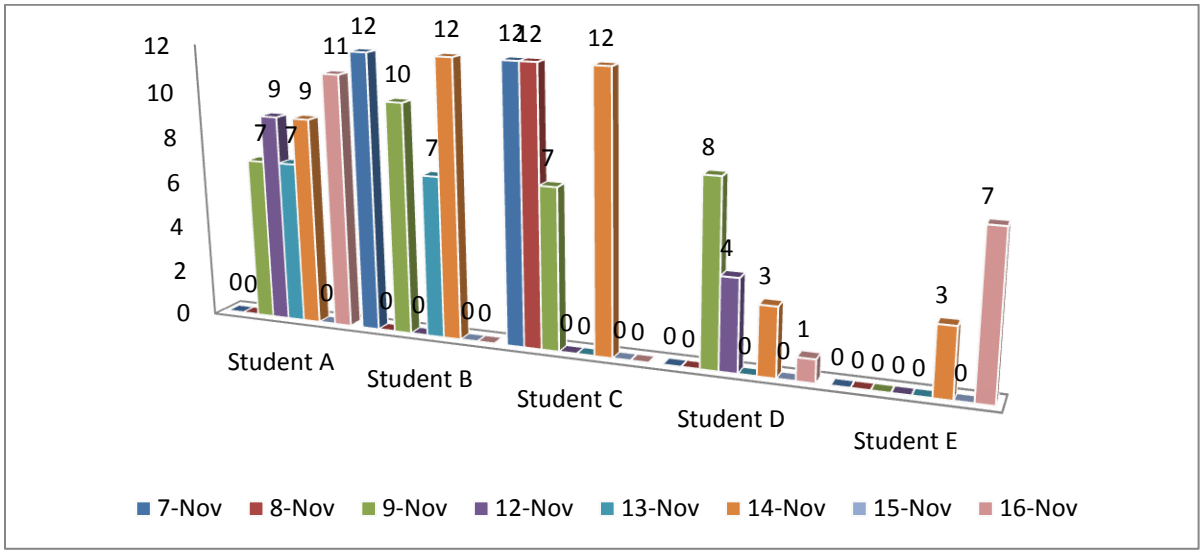

Table 4.3 Attendance and Behavioral Points

The table illustrates the relationship between daily student behavioral points earned attendance.

Conclusion

Although the data collected was specific to the two week research period, the attendance phenomenon and regular scheduling conflicts were not rare occurrences for classes at the Frost School. Student attendance issues and regular interruptions presented significant restrictions to the learning environment for both the teacher and student. However, the significant findings revealed that student participant responses and visual constructions indicate that their thinking was impacted by the concepts presented throughout the storytelling-themed lesson; students were motivated and engaged by stories of personal and meaningful significance; influenced by the artists' work as visual guides; and intrigued to learn more about their artist-teacher. The impact that the results of the classroom-based narrative study will have on the researcher's current and future art classroom environment, as well as recommendations for further research will be discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion and Conclusion

As discussed in Chapter Four, the research study was conducted to discover how adolescent students with emotional disabilities might construct their own stories about themselves and their world when prompted, guided, and provided with the opportunity to do so in the art classroom. The results of the study revealed overall positive student responses to the role of storytelling in the visual arts. The discussion to follow in Chapter Five addresses the impact of the results; how the results will be applied to further improve the professional development of the researcher, recommendations for future research, and the application of the results to both the field of art education and special education populations.

Discussion

The research study developed from the researcher's concern that she was not cultivating engaging and meaningful learning experiences for her student population. Based on previous experiences, the researcher questioned the effects of introducing lessons dependent on personal responses considering the vulnerability, unpredictability, and sometimes self-injurious behaviors of students with emotional disabilities. After acknowledging the value of stories in her own life and as a result of reading significant studies that link increased student participation and authentic learning environments to the application of storytelling, the researcher was curious to see if successes could be matched in her own classroom. Compared to her original impression of how Frost School students might respond, she was delighted by student participants' increased level of interest in the storytelling lesson presented. The length-based study proved to provide an analytical and reflective framework from which to discover that adolescent students with emotional disabilities at the Frost School are capable, willing, and eager to engage in personal and meaningful story constructions.

Personal Impact of the Study

Beyond the overarching research question, the researcher sought to answer whether empty responses from students in the past were due to a misunderstanding of the definition of a story. The results revealed students already had a basic understanding of storytelling, knew from the initial warm-up question the personal story they wanted to preserve, and needed little prompting throughout the lesson. When asked to preserve memories that were of interest and had significance to their own lives, all student participants immediately had answers. Not all of the stories were pleasant memories, but students were able to appropriately and safely express their visual concepts. Although the narrative examples were beneficial to students' understanding of visual processes and solutions, the significance of the study points to the overall accessibility of the storytelling lesson. Additionally, the results show that students were confident in their understanding of what was asked of them, not necessarily because the teacher had provided adequate and explicit examples, but because they had experiences worthy of sharing and were asked to do so in an appropriate and structured environment. The value of each student's story was further substantiated by the fact that the teacher supported their storytelling initiatives throughout the process.

The research discoveries are congruent with the scholarly writings presented in Chapter Two. The literature review was grounded in the research work of art educators Olson (1998) and Zander (2007), both of whom value storytelling as an overarching theme in the art classroom. Their studies have been further confirmed in this research study showing that stories can be employed to encourage and motivate students to participate in a meaningful, authentic, and personally identifying creative experience (Olson, 1998; Zander, 2007). In addition, the findings further deepen the researcher's understanding of the importance of offering students

with emotional disabilities a safe and supportive environment and appropriate outlet for expressing themselves (Guay 2006).

The impact of the research findings caused the researcher to reevaluate her perceptions and expectations of the students she teaches. Prior to the study, it was the researchers' original theory that students with emotional disabilities often believe that they have no story worthy of sharing. However, the results proved students believe otherwise and are confident in their ability to tell personal stories. The significance of this finding is indicative of the researcher's preconceived notion and misunderstanding of her students' emotional competencies and capabilities in making personal connections. As a result of this personal discovery, the researcher has adjusted her thinking and restructured her personal approach and philosophy of teaching.

Impact on Practice

It is the researcher's belief that the success of the study can be contributed to her own personal interest and enthusiasm in storytelling which was made transparent to the students during the lesson presentation and art-sharing experience. While the teacher took an interest in knowing more about her students' through their personal stories, they too took an interest in knowing more about her as an artist. Compared to the responses of the artist Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, the student participants showed more interest in the teacher. The fact that students were curious about their artist-teacher is a significant distinction for the researcher, and the most impactful discovery. The reciprocal curiosity and shared-interest relationship established was one that improved the efficacy of the positive, creative, and nurturing environment. Through this experience the researcher intends on introducing more personal works of art in the classroom.

She hopes that by doing so she will continue to exhibit to students the value of shared experiences and provide encouragement for them to do the same.

The most obvious impact the study had on the researcher's practice is the discovery of an effective and engaging theme. This discovery has implications not only for the immediate continuation of the unit plan, but for the design and structure of future lessons. The unit plan "Storytelling in Art – Using Jars to Do So" was a successful solution to the original problem of student motivation and personal connectedness to the art curricula (see Appendix A4. p 82). The clarity and realization that resulted from student responses to the lesson plan has increased the researcher's confidence in designing and presenting lessons and in relating more effectively to her adolescent students with emotional disabilities.

Recommendations

Prior to the completion of the study, the researcher began applying the storytelling concepts to her younger classes using storybooks to communicate the objective of the art project. For example, in the spirit of Halloween, the researcher read "There's a Nightmare in My Closet" to her elementary and middle school students. They were then asked to draw their bedrooms and closets, which were partially three-dimensional in construction, so that they could be opened to reveal their nightmares. Students' nightmare stories revealed humorous and realistic responses, such as hot sauce and chore lists. The researcher found this approach, particularly for the respective age group, to guide students' thinking and to provide the teacher with a theme that could continue to develop with each additional story. The storybook projects have provided consistency and overlap especially for classes which meet at most every week. Should the researcher conduct further research, she would apply the idea of using an actual storybook to

exhibit visual stories and would compare student responses to less literal examples of storytelling, such as the exemplar in this study.

There are minor adjustments that the researcher would make to the storytelling study if she were to replicate it. The artist exemplar used in the lesson is one detail the researcher would consider changing. While the contemporary artist example aligned with the style of artists student participants were currently studying, Gabriel Barcia-Colombo may have been too conceptual for some of the students. The researcher would also use actual storybooks (as described in the above section) to connect students to the lesson so that the learning experience was even more accessible and integrated across academic disciplines.

The most significant change the researcher would make to the study is the period of time she would allot to presenting lessons and collecting the data. As described in the Limitations of the Study and as presented in the Significant Constraints section of the results, scheduling conflicts and attendance issues played a major role in the collection of data. The researcher believes that given more time to present storytelling-themed lessons beyond the limited examples presented in this study, the results would reveal more specific solutions for streamlining curricula. Given a more extensive study, the researcher would have been able to provide students with the opportunity to develop a length-based project and potentially would have been able to discover more about the evolution of their understanding and of their constructions.

Because of the number of teacher frustrations noted throughout the study caused primarily by regular and constant scheduling issues, student attendance, and daily distractions, the researcher is interested in discovering the effects of these setbacks and whether a solution exists for minimizing them. The goal would not merely be to decrease teacher frustrations, but to see whether a relationship might exist between its negative effects on the teacher, student

attitudes, and levels of enthusiasm related to the lesson plan. The researcher believes that there is a significant connection to students' participation and school performance (hinted at in the storytelling study) which could be potentially avoided and/or resolved provided with a study to analyze the contributing factors in more depth.

Another topic of research provoked by the storytelling study is student responses and engagement to tangible works of art as opposed to screen projections of an artist image. It is of the researcher's belief that a contributing variable of the student's interest in her art as opposed to the featured artist exemplar was the fact that her art could be seen, touched, and analyzed by the students. Particularly for students of special populations, the researcher is curious to discover if viewing a tangible work of art might be a key aspect to increased intrigue.

The investigation of story constructions within the special education classroom revealed methods and ideas that can be applied by teachers in all fields. The researcher has already begun to share the study results with other staff members at the Frost School. Several of the researcher's cohorts have expressed interest and have acknowledged the effects of the storytelling-themed curricula because they been witnesses as visitors in her classes. The hope is that the conclusions discovered and shared by the researcher will be used by other educators to apply an integrated model of teaching and theme-based lessons.

Conclusion to the Research

The research study was an active and significant step toward exploring a solution to the problem of engaging adolescent students with emotional disabilities in the art classroom at the Frost School. The classroom-based narrative inquiry addressed concerns across the fields of

education and special populations within the discipline of art. Storytelling was successfully applied as a theme that traversed all areas of discussion.

The universality and accessibility of the overarching storytelling-themed unit provided student participants with the opportunity to relate and to share their own experiences for visual problem solving ideas. The stories told by students were meaningful and expressive; students responded with stories that memorialized recent losses of family members and pets; stories that celebrated new milestones such as learning to drive; and stories of family vacations still cherished years later.

The storytelling lesson made it possible for students to process, reflect, and consider meaningful life experiences. Within the context of the adolescent special education classroom, the narrative inquiry confirmed the phenomenon of storytelling in the art educational environment; that which when expressed and shared, learning takes place, levels of understanding deepen, and meaningful connections are made to oneself and others.

Advice to the Field of Art Education

The research study experience further confirmed for the teacher the foremost importance of fostering an empathetic and supportive environment in the art classroom. Students would not have constructed personal stories had they not felt comfortable and safe to share. Much of the research results discussion was in reference to the positive effects it had on students' learning, however, the value of listening to student stories for the teachers' growth and understanding should not be forgotten. Listening to students' interests and stories should be a way of relating and connecting to the individual first and the student second. When teachers value the stories their students tell, so too, do the students begin to see themselves as worthy individuals; one part

of a bigger picture. The art classroom is the ideal environment for continuing to provide meaningful experiences for our students and for spreading the message and power of storytelling.

Advice to Art Teachers

The researcher would specifically like to offer advice to art educators who teach students with disabilities either within a special education school or as part of an inclusion program. She knows the challenges that this population of students may present at times to their own learning initiative and the frustrations that may be associated with conveying concepts, engaging interests, and creating a safe, nurturing environment. The researcher learned through this research experience the importance of open-mindedness and flexibility. Teaching students with special needs requires continual dedication to the exploration and discovery of new ways of engaging student interests. It requires being open to new ideas and resolving to find viable solutions. Above all, it requires a commitment to your students and to knowing who they are. What better way to do this than through shared stories?

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Appendix

Appendix A1 – Method for Assigning Points for Observed Behaviors

Identified behaviors were recorded daily using the Classroom Dojo System. One point was designated for each identified behavior. Specific behaviors within the overarching behaviors were noted in the researcher's field notes.

Positive Behaviors	**Negative Behaviors**
Follows Classroom Procedures • *Raises hand* • *Communicates with teacher* • *Cleans space* • *Follows classroom rule*	Disregarding Rules • *Does not follow directions* • *Does not follow procedures* • *Does not put things away* • *Cheats/ plagiarism*
Being an Active Learner • *Insightful* • *Thoughtfulness* • *Takes a risk* • *Creativity* • *Effort* • *Works hard*	Physical Disruption • *Assaultive* • *Poor boundaries* • *Horseplay* • *Disrespect of property* Verbal Disruption • *Argumentative* • *Disrespectful* • *Whining* • *Lying*
Engagement • *Participates* • *Shares* • *Engages with lesson/project*	Disengaged • *Sleeping* • *Note engaged in class* • *Off task* • *Ignoring*

Overarching Behaviors = red font, Specific behaviors = *italics*

Appendix A2 - Interview Questions

Each student participant was asked the following series of questions.

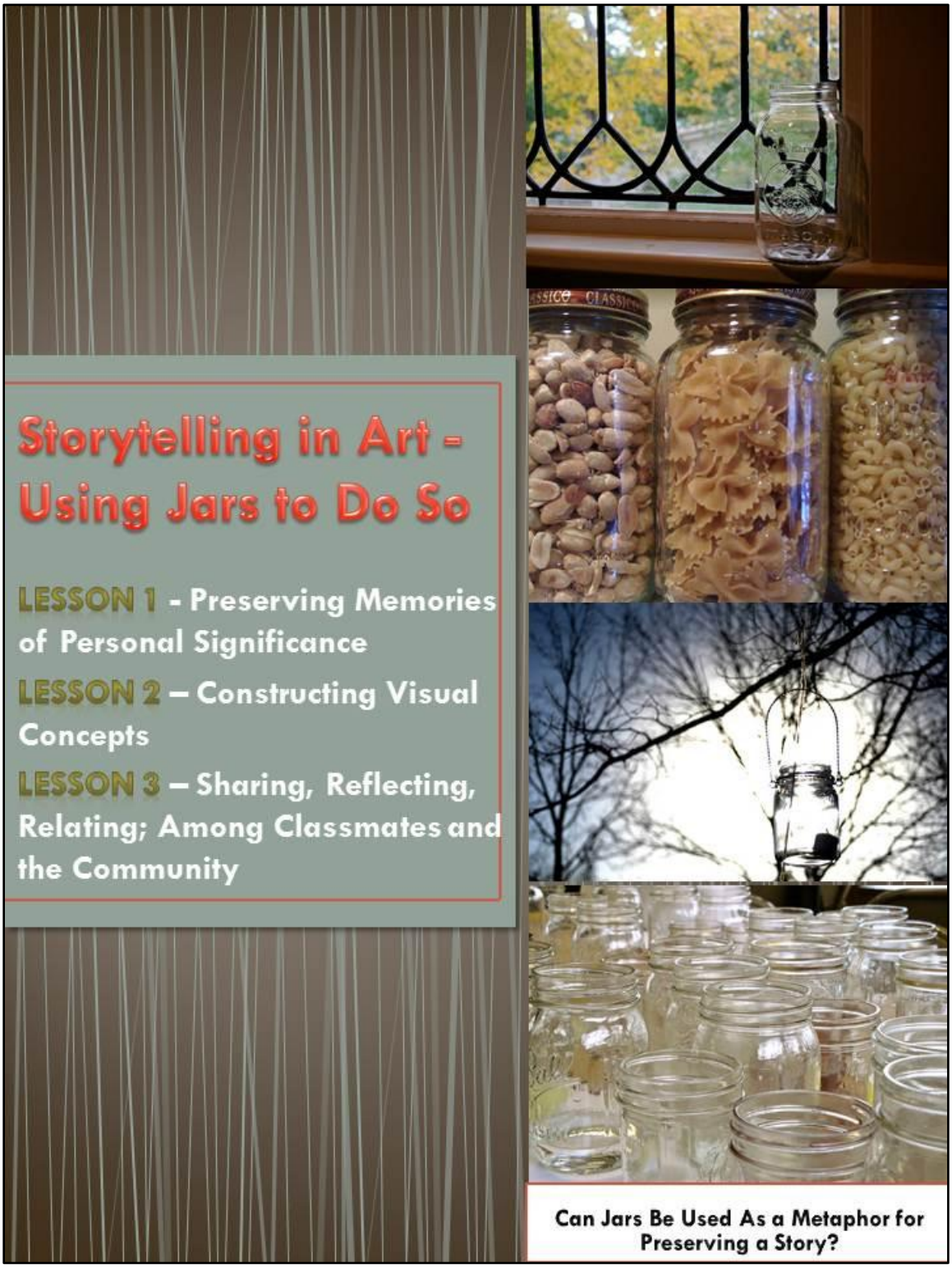
- What is your understanding of a story?
- Who tells stories?
- Do you consider yourself a storyteller?
- Did you feel more prepared to create your own work when provided with a visual example? Explain.
- How did you feel about creating your own work after the first visual exemplar?
- Did you feel at all frustrated in the art production process? If so, explain.
- Have you ever considered artists to be storytellers?
- Did learning about specific artists help to understand storytelling examples?
- Did you relate to the shared artists' story (including the teacher's)? Why or why not?
- Was it useful for the success of your own art work to learn about an artist's story?
- What is your definition of a visual story?
- Does sharing a story through art provide any sense of personal expression?
- Is it useful to create a work of art that is a personal exploration, or would you rather create without a deeper meaning?

Appendix A3 - Criteria Rubric to Analyze Student Artwork

Students' work was evaluated using a 1 - 4 point scale based on the criteria listed below. Comments were made when applicable in each designated box.

Criteria	4	3	2	1
How does this work compare to previous work?				
Does it show more feeling and expressiveness? Emotions?				
Does it show more thought?				
Does it show more skill?				
How original, innovative, and daring is the work?				
Does it extend or change from past work done by the same student?				
How well does the work solve the problems outlined in this assignment?				
Are the variations from the assignment made for a valid reason? Risk taking?				
Does the work reflect an understanding of the material and concepts presented?				
Total Points:				

Appendix A4 – Unit Plan: Storytelling in Art – Using Jars to Do So



Unit Rationale:

All students have stories to tell. Although, many students may not acknowledge the value of their own stories or recognize the importance of sharing them as a representation of their personal experiences. The goal of this unit is to offer students the opportunity to discover the power of their own stories. According to Ahn and Filipenko (2007), "sharing narratives and reflecting on what such narratives mean, how they have affected and continue to affect an individual, opens the possibility for much greater understanding of self" (p. 279). In this unit students are introduced to the theme of storytelling in the context of the art classroom as a vehicle for self-identification. This unit was designed to encourage and foster adolescent students with emotional disabilities to explore personal and meaningful experiences, to construct visual concepts representative of these experiences, and to share them with others.

Olson (1998) argues that "the vast majority of art either relates to story in and of itself or relates in some way to the individual artist's life and is therefore a part of the artist's personal narrative" (p. 168). The contemporary video sculptor, Gabriel Barcia-Colombo, is used as the inspiration for the visual constructions and the featured artist exemplar. Students are prompted to preserve memories, friendships, and family relationships using the juxtaposition of gestures, postures, and objects in a jar to tell these stories. By presenting both the artwork of Gabriel Barcia-Colombo and a narrative video of the artist explaining the motivation for his work, the hope is that students will begin to understand and recognize the interwoven and complementary relationship between art and story. In addition to the presentation of the contemporary artist unfamiliar to students, the teacher shares her visual story and artist narrative to reinforce the storytelling concepts.

GOALS:	The student will:
(Following the Maryland State, Montgomery County Visual Arts Curriculum Standards)	**<u>Understand:</u>** Artists may select specific design concepts to convey meaning in artistic exemplars. (MCPS Standard I) Ways in which themes, ideas, and issues in human experience are translated and expressed through the arts. (MCPS Standard II) Appropriate art vocabulary used to describe, analyze, and interpret visual qualities found in the work of artists. (MCPS Standard III) **<u>Know:</u>** How to select and use tools, materials, and techniques in the creative process to solve elegant problems and to communicate ideas of personal meaning. (MCPS Standard II) Ways of critiquing personal artworks and that of others and making visual aesthetic judgments. (MCPS Standard IV) How contemporary artists select modes of representation through video projections and print to express personal ideas, thoughts, and feelings. (MCPS Standard I) **<u>Be Able to:</u>** Interpret and communicate the meaning of art works and compare how artists use narrative conventions in selected artworks. (MCPS Standard I) Construct narrative artworks from observation, memory, and imagination and explain reason for selecting specific visual concepts to convey meaning in personal artworks. (MCPS Standard I) Reflect on the visual concepts for the storytelling constructions, to describe, analyze, and interpret the meaning created and evaluate the choice and use of materials, media, skills and knowledge in solving the art problem. (MCPS Standard III) Draw upon individual experiences as the basis for personally meaningful images (MCPS Standard III)

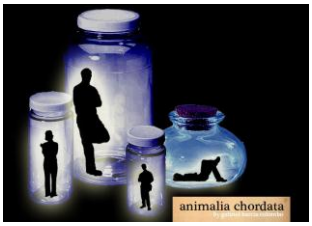
Instructional Concepts:

The extensive studies and classroom experiences of art educator and scholar, Janet Olson (1998), reveal the relationship between storytelling and the visual arts which informs the overarching concepts of this unit. She believes that "retelling their own life experiences helps people to understand the universal and human condition and to be part of the universal human family" (p. 165). Additionally, her studies have revealed that "the classroom is an ideal environment in which to encourage the telling of students' stories. Storytelling is both an opportunity and a necessity…."(p.185).

At the foundation of this unit plan is also the concept of a student-centered teaching philosophy; once the individual student is known on a more personal level, the art teacher is in a position to offer appropriate support. Delaney (1998) believes, "if you try to see each one as an individual, and look for ways to connect with them, you will reach some of your students" (p. 130). Janet Olson (2003) reminds art teachers "one must never forget that it is the uniqueness of the individual and the human experience that informs the artistic process" (p. 41). Storytelling is used as a theme in this unit to provide the teacher with a better understanding of the individual student and to connect the individual student's experiences to the artmaking process.

LESSONS:	
• Lesson 1 Preserving Memories of Personal Significance	A power point presentation is shared with students to introduce and illustrate the concept of storytelling. Various images of jars containing a myriad of objects is shown and used as a metaphor for preserving significant memories. Still-images of the artwork by contemporary video-sculptor Gabriel Barcia-Colombo are presented. Responses to a written journal activity in which students identify personal stories worth remembering are shared and discussed in relationship to the visuals exemplar. Students are prompted to construct three thumbnail sketches illustrating their identified stories.
• Lesson 2 Constructing Visual Concepts	A TED video of Gabriel Barcia-Colombo is shared so that students can learn more about how the artist captures and preserves his personal stories and how his childhood interests have led to this process. Following a discussion about the artist's art and story, students are asked to make edits to their thumbnail sketches. The teacher confers with students on the materials, methods, and techniques to be used to further develop their story constructions. One to two days is spent on finalizing details of the visual concepts.
• Lesson 3 Sharing, Reflecting, Relating; Among Classmates and the Community	The teacher presents her artwork related to the theme of preserving memories in a jar. Students are asked to analyze it for meaning. The teacher shares her story and motivation for creating it. Students are asked to share their art with the class. Students reflect on the creative experience and relate their journey through individually written and developed artist statements. Titles are given to the final visual concept constructions as clues to the artist's stories. Students and teacher complete grading rubrics for assessment purposes.

MATERIALS:	
	• Drawing pencils (HB – 8B) • Student journals (Notesketches) for warm-ups responses • Newsprint • Scissors • Glue • Rulers • Acrylic paint, oil pastels, color pencils, markers • Brushes of various sizes and shapes • Palettes, water jars, mixing cups • Computer and Photoshop software • Collage items

EXEMPLARS:	
	▪ Various images of jars ▪ "Animalia Chordata", Gabriel Barcia- Colombo ▪ Ted video: Gabriel Barcia-Colombo: Video sculptor http://www.ted.com/speakers/gabriel_barcia_colombo.html  

TEACHER'S PRODUCT VISUALS:	
	• Teacher exemplar- jar print • Power Point Presentation – "Storytelling in Art – Using Jars to Do So" • Handout with slide images from Power Point Presentation – color reproductions • Grading rubric for visual concept construction – student and teacher copies • Storytelling in Jars – Artist Statement handout

ASSESSMENTS:	
	▪ Daily point system will be used to evaluate behavior and participation throughout all lessons. Points will be recorded using the Classroom Dojo System ▪ Discussion contribution and participation ▪ Participation in sharing/critique ▪ Student use of Notesketches – planning and organizing ▪ Artist statements written to reflect visual decisions ▪ Title assignment ▪ Self-Assessed and teacher-assessed rubric for visual concept construction

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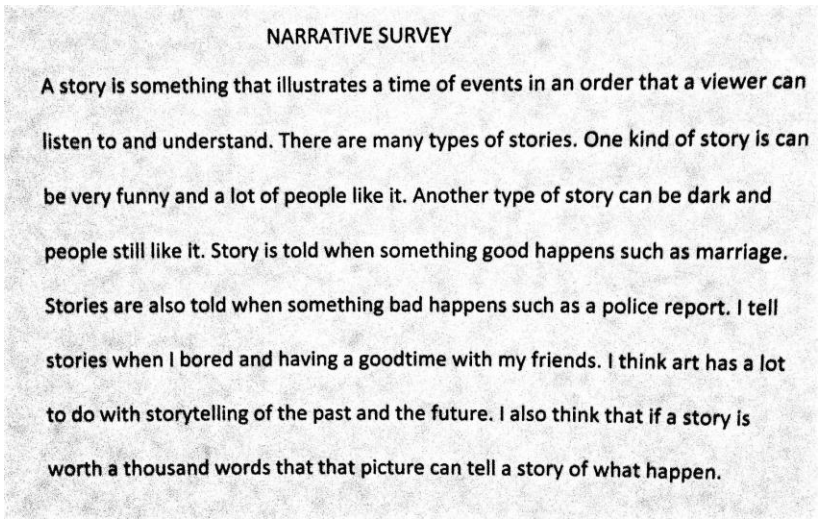
Appendix B1- Student Responses to the Narrative Survey

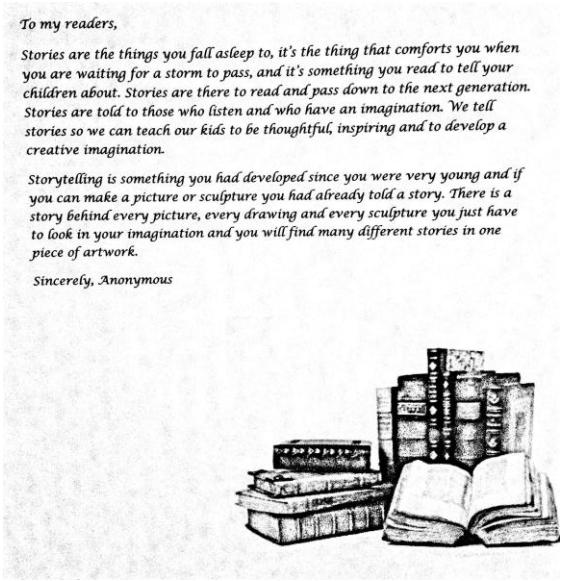
Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrates that the student participants had a different understanding of what a story is based on his/her experiences.



NARRATIVE SURVEY

A story is something that illustrates a time of events in an order that a viewer can listen to and understand. There are many types of stories. One kind of story is can be very funny and a lot of people like it. Another type of story can be dark and people still like it. Story is told when something good happens such as marriage. Stories are also told when something bad happens such as a police report. I tell stories when I bored and having a goodtime with my friends. I think art has a lot to do with storytelling of the past and the future. I also think that if a story is worth a thousand words that that picture can tell a story of what happen.

Figure 4.1: Student A's narrative survey response



To my readers,

Stories are the things you fall asleep to, it's the thing that comforts you when you are waiting for a storm to pass, and it's something you read to tell your children about. Stories are there to read and pass down to the next generation. Stories are told to those who listen and who have an imagination. We tell stories so we can teach our kids to be thoughtful, inspiring and to develop a creative imagination.

Storytelling is something you had developed since you were very young and if you can make a picture or sculpture you had already told a story. There is a story behind every picture, every drawing and every sculpture you just have to look in your imagination and you will find many different stories in one piece of artwork.

Sincerely, Anonymous

Figure 4.2: Student C's narrative survey response

Appendix B2- Student Responses to the Narrative Survey (cont.)

Figures 4.3 illustrates that the student participants had a different understanding of what a story is based on his/her experiences.

What is a story?

A story is a happening in which is included an introduction, rising action, plot, falling action, and an ending.

When do people tell stories?

Sometimes to their children before bed, sometimes over a typewriter, it really depends on your imagination.

When do you tell stories?

I don't.

What role do you think storytelling can have in an art room?

It might inspire viewers for art making.

Do you know any artists who are storytellers?

Many singers tell stories through music about their life. The one that first comes to mind is the distressing Eminem song called "insane".

How are art and storytelling related?

Some artists like to make stories about their artwork.

Lots of art has stories behind it.

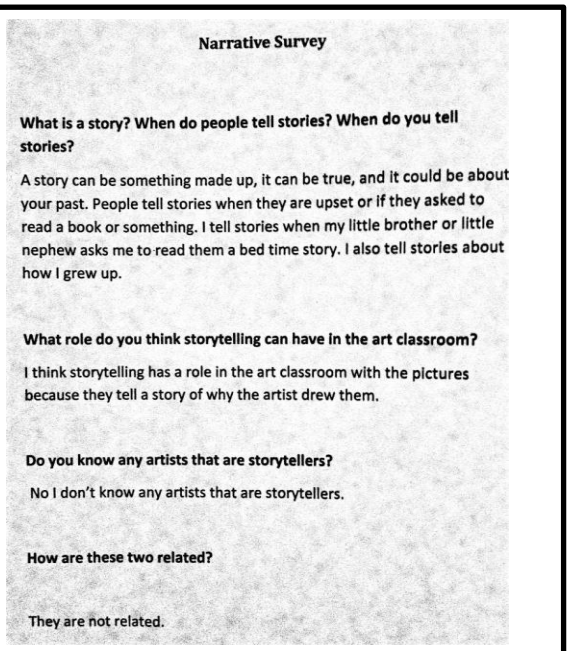
Images of stories

This is a painting that tells the reader a story of what's going on.

Figure 4.3: Student E's narrative survey response

Appendix B3- Student Responses to the Narrative Survey (cont.)

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 illustrates that the student participants had a different understanding of what a story is based on his/her experiences.



Narrative Survey

What is a story? When do people tell stories? When do you tell stories?

A story can be something made up, it can be true, and it could be about your past. People tell stories when they are upset or if they asked to read a book or something. I tell stories when my little brother or little nephew asks me to read them a bed time story. I also tell stories about how I grew up.

What role do you think storytelling can have in the art classroom?

I think storytelling has a role in the art classroom with the pictures because they tell a story of why the artist drew them.

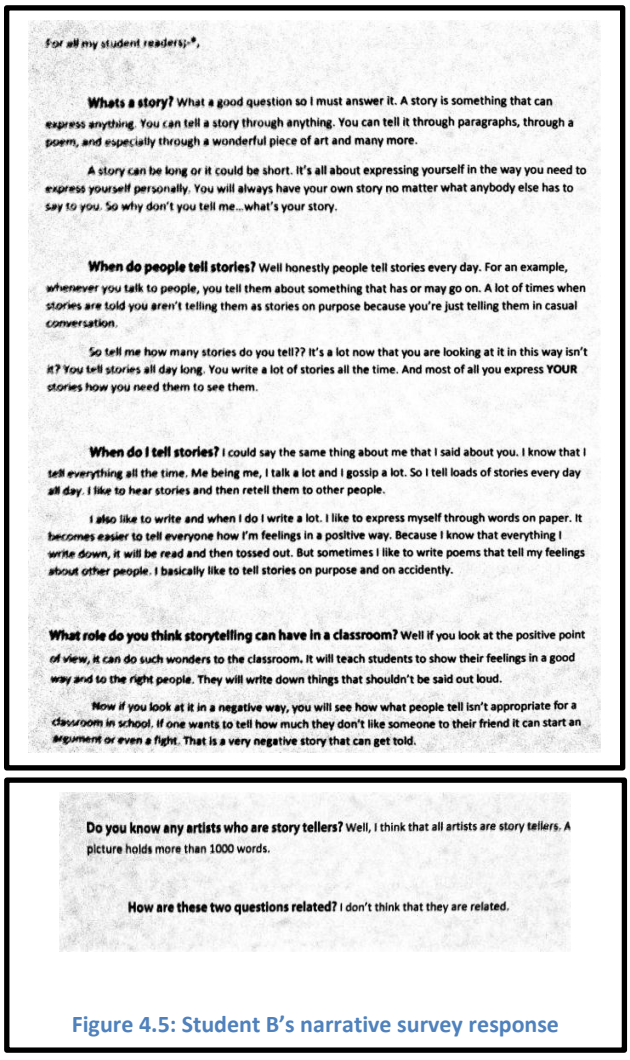
Do you know any artists that are storytellers?

No I don't know any artists that are storytellers.

How are these two related?

They are not related.

Figure 4.4: Student D's narrative survey response



For all my student readers;*,

Whats a story? What a good question so I must answer it. A story is something that can express anything. You can tell a story through anything. You can tell it through paragraphs, through a poem, and especially through a wonderful piece of art and many more.

A story can be long or it could be short. It's all about expressing yourself in the way you need to express yourself personally. You will always have your own story no matter what anybody else has to say to you. So why don't you tell me...what's your story.

When do people tell stories? Well honestly people tell stories every day. For an example, whenever you talk to people, you tell them about something that has or may go on. A lot of times when stories are told you aren't telling them as stories on purpose because you're just telling them in casual conversation.

So tell me how many stories do you tell?? It's a lot now that you are looking at it in this way isn't it? You tell stories all day long. You write a lot of stories all the time. And most of all you express **YOUR** stories how you need them to see them.

When do I tell stories? I could say the same thing about me that I said about you. I know that I tell everything all the time. Me being me, I talk a lot and I gossip a lot. So I tell loads of stories every day all day. I like to hear stories and then retell them to other people.

I also like to write and when I do I write a lot. I like to express myself through words on paper. It becomes easier to tell everyone how I'm feelings in a positive way. Because I know that everything I write down, it will be read and then tossed out. But sometimes I like to write poems that tell my feelings about other people. I basically like to tell stories on purpose and on accidently.

What role do you think storytelling can have in a classroom? Well if you look at the positive point of view, it can do such wonders to the classroom. It will teach students to show their feelings in a good way and to the right people. They will write down things that shouldn't be said out loud.

Now if you look at it in a negative way, you will see how what people tell isn't appropriate for a classroom in school. If one wants to tell how much they don't like someone to their friend it can start an argument or even a fight. That is a very negative story that can get told.

Do you know any artists who are story tellers? Well, I think that all artists are story tellers. A picture holds more than 1000 words.

How are these two questions related? I don't think that they are related.

Figure 4.5: Student B's narrative survey response

Appendix B4 – Student Responses to Warm-up Questions and Visual Concepts

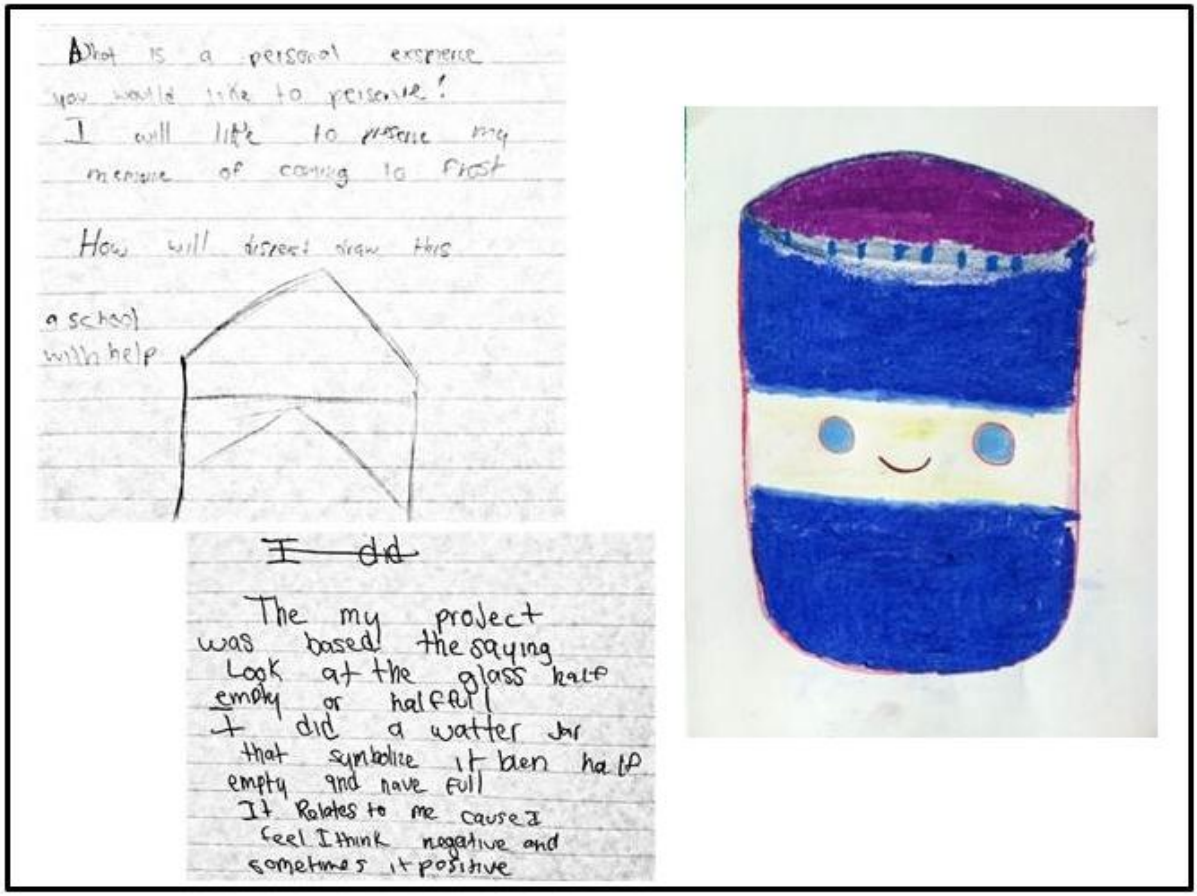


Figure 4.6 shows the relationship between Student B's original story idea and his final visual concept. He was the only student participant whose story changed throughout the production phase.

Appendix B5 – Student Responses to Warm-up Questions and Visual Concepts (cont.)

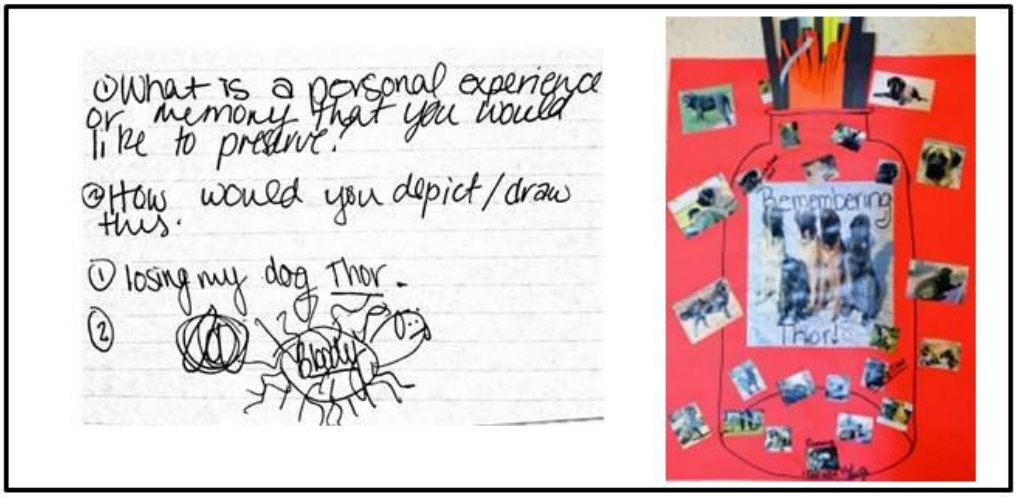


Figure 4.7 illustrates Student B's visual concept related to the loss of her dog Thor.

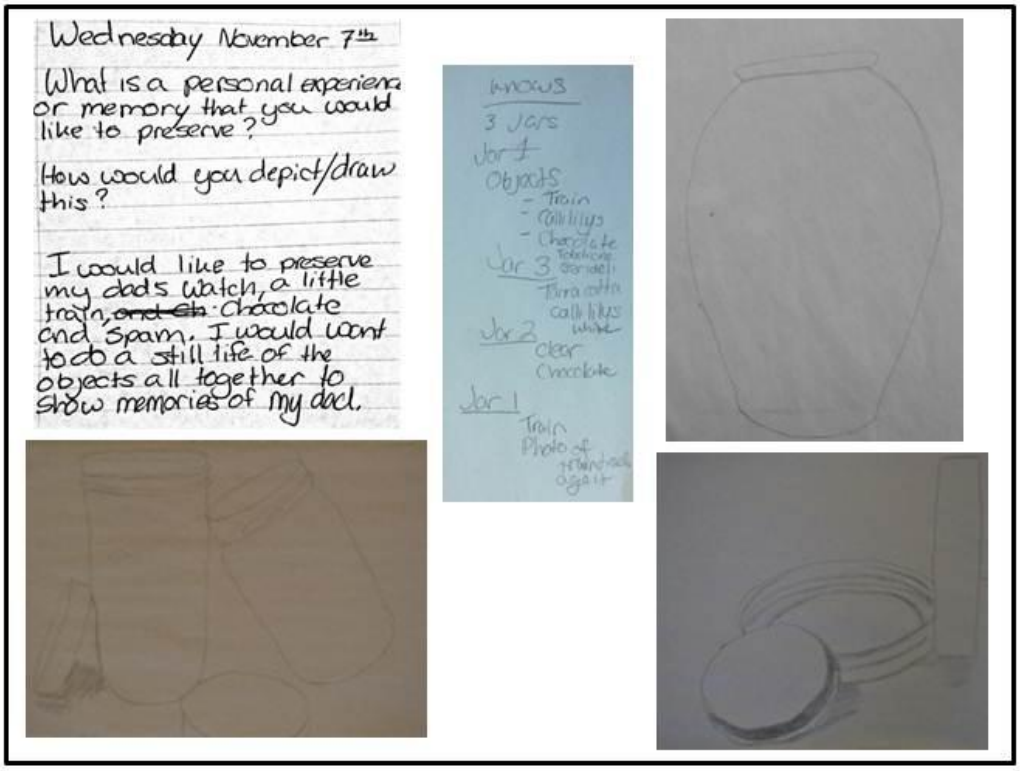


Figure 4.8 illustrates how Student C chose to memorialize the recent death of her father through the use of three distinct jars and their contents.

Appendix B6 – Student Responses to Warm-up Questions and Visual Concepts (cont.)

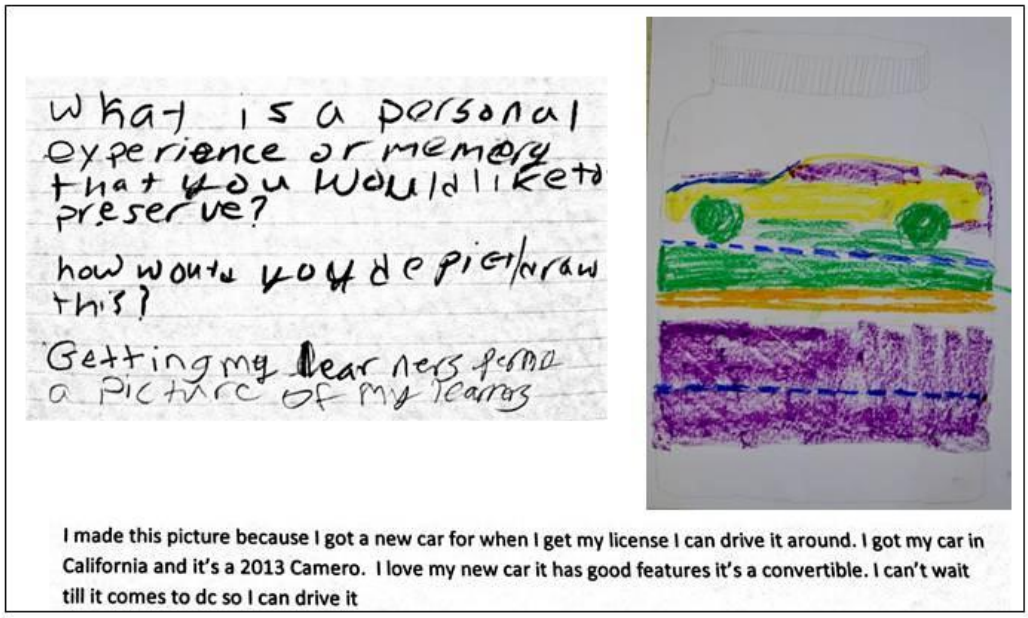


Figure 4.9 illustrates the subtle changes Student D made to his original story concept.

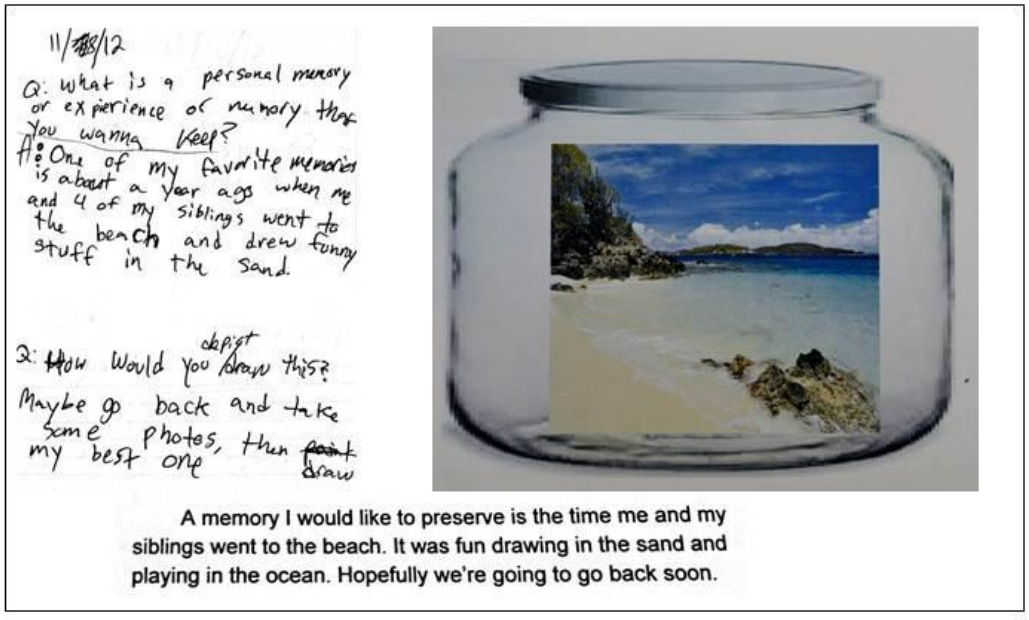


Figure 4.10 illustrates the commitment Student E had to her warm-up response, as evidenced in her final visual concept construction and statement about her art.